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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["I PUT IT IN MY POCKET!" RETURNED THE CHILD, "I WAS CROSS, AND I WANTED TO PAY HIM OUT!"]

BERYL'S SECRET.

CHAPTER XI.

It is astonishing how intimate being thrown together in a small house makes people. Lady Lyndon might have had John Campbell's name on her visiting list for years without knowing him so well as she felt to do after only a few days' companionship with him in Mrs. Arnot's cottage. She liked the young doctor far better than she had ever been able to like Philip Arnison, though at one time she had almost brought herself to regard the latter as the saviour of little Bab's life.

The fact was, while Philip Arnison shrouded his past in mystery, and said nothing even of his present, John Campbell was open, and candid almost to a fault. He did not bore people with long confidences, but the main facts of his life were soon known to anyone who came in contact with him. He was not American by birth, though the last five years of his life had been spent in the

United States. He had studied medicine in England, and taken the degree of M.D. as soon as his years permitted. About that time, while enjoying a holiday in Paris, he fell in with an American merchant and his daughter. He speedily grew intimate with both, and the old gentleman being carried off after only a few hours' illness he married Miss Carter, believing firmly that she was a friendless orphan utterly unprovided for.

The young doctor's friends always fancied the pretty American had lost her heart to him, and let him find it out. Anyway, there could be no question she was devoted to him, and hoped to please him, when, a week after their wedding, she disclosed to him the astonishing fact that her "Pa" had been senior partner in an enormous firm in New York, and she was a colossal heiress.

Jack was a brave fellow. He never let her know this was a shock to him—never let her guess he had married her out of pity. They went to America. The fortune was realised, and for two years Mrs. Campbell was the acknowledged belle of Saratoga and other New World resorts; then she faded away and

left Jack a widower, her last words being a whisper, "she had been so happy."

After that he travelled incessantly for many months. He tried practising in New York, but home sickness attacked him. He positively longed for a sight of his native land; and so, by the time he had been a widower longer than he had been a husband, he sailed for Europe, his grief for his Kitty chastened to an affectionate regret, and his ambition pining for fame in his profession.

"I mean to settle in Harley-street, and make a name," he told Lady Lyndon, hopefully; "only I wish everyone wouldn't call me American. I'm English born and bred, and I don't like people to forget it."

"I shall never forget your kindness to Basil," said my lady, quietly, "and I fear the delay here will have inconvenienced you."

"Not the least in the world," he said, pleasantly. "I never thought of settling down before January, and I have taken a great fancy to your son. I should like to pull him through."

"But have you no relations of your own expecting you anxiously?"

"I have not a relation in the world! My wife and I were both only children and orphans. Our parents were the same, so you see I can't boast even a cousin."

"Then you must miss your wife! It seems terrible you should be left so lonely."

"She had such a happy life," said Jack, gravely. "She was just like a hummingbird. She seemed made for love and warmth and brightness. You couldn't fancy Kitty growing old or grave. She was only twenty when she died!"

After this Lady Lyndon felt quite easy in her own mind. Money evidently was of no moment to Dr. Campbell. The delay in resuming his profession would be no detriment to him; and if, as he said, he was alone in the world, why, it might cheer him to feel himself of so much use to Basil.

She was not a matchmaking mother, but it did strike her once or twice that if only Paulina had been at Garby, she and the handsome young doctor might have fallen in love. The mother would have preferred him infinitely to Philip Arnison as a son-in-law; and since he did not seem inconsolable for his wife's loss, he would surely have been attracted by Paulina's beauty.

Meanwhile he was very good to Paulina's sister. He seemed to have a knack of drawing Jessy out, and making her appear at her best, until Lady Lyndon came to the conclusion she had somewhat undervalued her second daughter, and that when Paulina married Jessy might make a very attractive bride-maid after all.

And Sir Basil progressed slowly towards recovery, improving gradually, but so steadily, that Dr. Campbell declared he would be able to travel to his own house by the first of September.

"And you will come with us?" pleaded the invalid one day, when Lady Lyndon had gone on a shopping expedition to Garby, and Dr. Campbell and Jessy were in sole charge, since Mrs. Arnold had gone to see Lady Mary Cameron, who was very ill. "You must come to Lyndon, and let us try to make you feel at home there!"

"I will come gladly," said Jack, warmly, "for a day or two; after that I must think about going to London."

Sir Basil shuddered. "Is it cowardly, doctor? Do you know I feel as though I should dread entering a train again for the rest of my days? I can't explain it to you, but the moment I think of a railway carriage I seem to see that man's face bending over me full of malignant fury."

"Do you think you should know him again?" asked Jessy, who sat by the window with her knitting.

"I should know his eyes anywhere. Campbell, why do you look at me like that? Don't you believe me?"

"If I did I should feel a great deal easier about you," confessed the doctor. "We haven't talked much about this, for I was afraid of upsetting you, and alarming Lady Lyndon; but you are so much better now I should rather like to discuss it."

"By all means," said Basil, cheerily. "The mother is safe for another two hours, and I feel quite a giant of strength. Only there is Jessy. Don't frighten her into hysterics."

"I am not silly enough for them!" said Jessy, indignantly. "And I am longing to hear what you think, Basil. Do you know I have a theory of my own about that hateful old man, which everyone laughs at? I believe he was a woman."

Sir Basil took the suggestion quite calmly. Evidently he had no cause to think any woman was his enemy. He even smiled at his little sister's egotism.

"Certainly, Jessy, you don't think very favourably of your sex; but, my dear, it was not a woman. The hand, the one point where disguise had been neglected, was not a woman's!"

"You are quite sure?"

"Perfectly, Dame Trot," this was his pet

name for her. "Your theory falls to the ground. Now perhaps you'll listen to mine. I believe it was a simple case of self-defence."

"Self-defence?"

"Self preservation then, if you like it better. What I mean is the man was some criminal flying from justice, and he took it into his head I recognised him, and meant to denounce him—therefore he took measures to ensure my silence. I believe that is the true history of the affair, Jessy."

"And then you would have nothing to fear?"

"Just so; but Dr. Campbell is shaking his head at us incredulously."

"You seem to forget, Lyndon, I saw the man at the landing-stage waiting for you."

"That last is pure imagination, my dear fellow. I don't suppose he informed you he was waiting for Basil Lyndon?"

"No, but—"

"Go on. I am all attention, and Jessy looks dying with curiosity."

"Basil," said the girl, anxiously, "I wish you wouldn't jest about it."

"I don't really, Dame Trot, only the doctor will look on the black side."

"Mrs. Arnold agrees with me," retorted Campbell, in rather an injured tone.

"Mrs. Arnold! The plot thickens. Campbell, don't look so disgusted at my frivolity. Just tell me what is in your mind."

"I believe the man was watching for you," said the Doctor, defiantly. "I believe he meant to kill you, and that, having failed in his object once, he will appear again and again when you are off your guard, and repeat the attack until he succeeds."

"I must say you are cheerful."

But Jessy took John Campbell's part.

"I think the doctor is quite right," she said, stoutly. "Forewarned is forearmed. Do you know, Mrs. Arnold thought just the same, and she made up her mind you should never be allowed to see a stranger alone until you were quite well and strong again."

"You can think now, without any fear of brain fever," said Dr. Campbell, solemnly. "I want you to look back over the last few years, and tell us if you ever had a quarrel with anyone?"

"Never."

"You are quite certain there is no one in the world, man or woman, who would be the gainer by your death?"

"Quite certain," but at that instant he remembered Gem, and an awful explanation of the attempt at his death came to him. If Gem had married again believing that first ceremony illegal, and had since discovered it was binding—if she lived in fear of discovery, would she not have the strongest possible reasons for desiring his death?

She had not urged that murderous attack; he would stake his life on it. The girl-wife he had loved so fondly would not have sought his life, but the man who had married her might have done so. If Gem had forgotten and forsaken him for another, would not that other have the strongest possible cause to object to his return to England?

"You have found the clue," said Jessy, who was watching him intently. "It is written in your face!"

"I think so." Oh! how sad and weary his voice sounded. "Campbell, you must judge. I can only speak vaguely, but you will be able to piece out the story for yourself. It is in my power to deprive a man of what he values most on earth. Would not that man seek my life, since only my death would ensure his possession of it?"

"Is it diamonds?" asked Jessy, eagerly. "Out there did you find some valuable stones, and entrust them to a friend to bring home to England for you?"

"Not quite, little sister," he spoke to Jessy, but his eyes sought Campbell's face, "but you are nearly right. When I went abroad I left my greatest valuable behind me. It was not a diamond, but to me it was as precious. I came home to reclaim it, and—"

"Don't!" cried Campbell, kindly, for, unlike innocent Jessy, he read between the lines, and knew that the "valuable" was a woman's heart. "Don't say another word, my dear fellow. We quite understand, and I repeat my former warning. Beware of strangers, and never willingly be *l'le-d'le* with one, for I fear your danger is not over yet."

A loud knocking at the door, the sound of confused voices, and then Mrs. Arnold's little maid knocked at the door of the pleasant room, where Sir Basil lay on the sofa.

"If you please, sir,"—to Campbell—"it's a lady, and she says she's Miss Lyndon."

Jessy started to her feet.

"It can't be Paulina!"

But before she could go and see the newcomer had forced her way into the room.

Dr. Campbell always felt afterwards that it was a presentiment of evil, which made him recoil from the beautiful face and graceful form.

Miss Lyndon utterly ignored both him and Sir Basil. She addressed herself pointedly to her sister.

"You must go home at once, Jessy. Barbara is ill, and I can't manage sick children."

"Babette ill?" the tears stood in Jessy's eyes. "Why, Aunt Juliet never mentioned it in the letter we had to-day!"

"You have not spoken to me, Paulina," said Sir Basil, kindly. "How altered you are? I can hardly believe you are the little sister I left five years ago."

Paulina gave him two fingers.

"Your illness has been most inconvenient," she observed, coldly. "We have been moped to death. I have been nothing but a nursery maid for three weeks, and—"

Her voice died away, for Mrs. Arnold had come in. Never was arrival more opportune. Dr. Campbell exchanged one glance with her, and she understood.

"Will you come into the other room, please, Miss Lyndon? Too many visitors are bad for Sir Basil in his weak state."

Now, Paulina's instructions from her lover were to gain Mrs. Arnold's confidence at any cost, so she could not treat her as rudely as she had the others. She positively smiled as she bowed to the nurse, and said—

"Certainly. My sister had better come too, as she must return to Sussex to-night."

Dr. Campbell quietly followed Jessy into the passage, and remarked, carelessly—

"Of course you will not think of leaving until your mother returns? I am positive she will not allow you to start to-day, as you could not reach the Hall before dusk."

"There is a telegram for your mother," said Mrs. Arnold, pleasantly. "Indeed, it is meant for you equally, so I think you had better read it before you say any more about going home."

Lady Elton was not quite so easily deceived as her niece had fancied. The moment she reached the Hall and heard of Paulina's departure, she felt tolerably sure anxiety for Babette was not the real cause; and when the old gardener, plucking up courage, whispered that Miss Lyndon and the tutor often met after dark, and walked together in the grounds, a nameless fear took possession of her, and she telegraphed to her sister with quite a reckless expenditure of words, though the new scheme had come in, and each one cost a halfpenny.

"Juliet Elton to Lady or Miss Jessy Lyndon." That in itself was a masterly device, since it ensured the telegram not being opened by Paulina, as Jessy and her mother were sure not to be out together.

"Babette has only slight cold. I have taken her and all the others to the Park till you return. No need for anxiety; have written fully."

When Lady Lyndon came in she was more annoyed than Paulina had ever seen her.

"If Babette was really ill, you ought not to have left her. You have given your aunt a

great deal of anxiety, and cast another person on Mrs. Arnold's hospitality when the cottage is overfull already."

"Send that young man away then! Basil does not look ill enough to want a male nurse."

"Paulina, are you mad? Dr. Campbell is a physician, and a personal friend of ours!"

"Oh! Then, I suppose, he won't send in a bill? I should think, if he did, it would be a heavy one, as he seems to live here!"

Poor Lady Lyndon felt bewildered that a child of hers should speak so strangely!

"People don't think of money when those they love are at the point of death!" she said, gravely. "I can't understand you at all, Paulina."

"You don't care for me," said her daughter, fretfully. "I believe, mamma, that is the truth of it. Anyone else would be pleased to see me, and glad to exchange my company for that of Jessy's."

"You know I can't send Jessy home alone," said Lady Lyndon, much troubled and perplexed. "She is utterly unused to travelling. Besides, I don't think you could take her place with Basil. I shall do nothing till I hear from your Aunt Juliet."

But when Lady Elton's promised letter arrived it rather added to her sister's anxieties.

The Countess wrote frankly that Paulina and Mr. Arnison had indulged in clandestine meetings, which had been discovered by the servants.

She could not remonstrate with the tutor, since she shrank from bringing her niece's name into the discussion; therefore, Mr. Arnison must fulfil his engagement at the Park, and it only ended on the twentieth of September. Till then, she urged her sister to keep Paulina under her own eye.

She had taken all the younger children to Elton, and would keep them till their mother's return; but she shrank from inviting either of the elder girls while Philip Arnison was in Sussex.

Lady Lyndon told her perplexities to Mrs. Arnold. Her house was empty, and she did not like to send Paulina back to utter loneliness. She much regretted her inopportune arrival, but as she was at Glenfries she could do what she pleased.

Margaret Arnold hesitated.

"I don't think Miss Lyndon a good nurse, my lady. I am sure if she is in this cottage she must be kept away from Sir Basil. Even yesterday she seemed to agitate him."

"She shall never enter his room. Indeed, Mrs. Arnold, I grieve to trouble you, but she is so young I can't send her to an hotel or boarding-house alone."

"And I would not ask you to," said the nurse, kindly. "Miss Lyndon shall have the little dressing-room beyond Sir Basil's chamber. It is very small, but it has a separate entrance. If we lock the door between, the rooms will be quite distinct."

So it was arranged. Paulina expressed neither approval nor objections. She seemed strangely indifferent to all that went on around her.

Her mother feared the attachment to Mr. Arnison had gone farther than she thought.

Jessy was openly indignant with her sister for being "like a statue."

Sir Basil, in spite of her coldness, showed a marked partiality for the beautiful girl, while Dr. Campbell and Mrs. Arnold frankly confessed to each other they "could not make her out."

"She is desperately unhappy, or she has some secret illness, I don't know which," said the nurse, gravely, to John Campbell the third night after Paulina's arrival. "She is always very polite to me, more so far than she is to her own people. But I can't take to her as I did to Miss Jessy."

"Jessy is worth a dozen of her," said Jack, simply, "and why this young lady should treat her like that I can't understand. I pity Lady Lyndon for having such a daughter."

From which it will be understood that Lady Lyndon's dream that Jack Campbell might banish Mr. Arnison's image from Paulina's memory was not likely to be fulfilled.

No one sat up with Sir Basil now. Someone always visited him the last thing at night, and Mrs. Arnold went into his room as soon as she left her own—usually about six in the morning.

But the day after her conversation with Dr. Campbell she was later than her wont, and it was almost seven before she saw her patient.

He was lying in bed, his eyelids closed, his hands cold and stiff, his whole form motionless.

She believed at first he had fainted, but when the minutes passed and the swoon did not yield to the usual remedies she was thoroughly alarmed, and went to call Jack Campbell.

He gave one glance at Basil, and then poured a cordial between the tightly-clenched teeth; another moment, and there was a slight sign of reviving life.

In half-an-hour he seemed as well as usual, but the cloud on the doctor's brow did not relax; and when Lady Lyndon came in he left the invalid in her hands, and told Margaret he wished to speak to her downstairs.

"You will not leave Sir Basil a moment?" he warned Lady Lyndon. "And do not admit a creature. After such an attack he needs absolute quiet."

Strangely impressed, Mrs. Arnold followed him downstairs. Their eyes met. Something in his suddenly enlightened her, and she cried eagerly,—

"You don't mean that it was poison?"

"Just that—and administered by a novice. He will get over it this time, but a very little more would have been fatal."

Her eyes breathed the question,—

"Who did it?"

"Don't ask me. I could only answer from suspicions, and we ought to have facts before we speak."

"Do you think"—oh! how her voice trembled—"that that man is in the neighbourhood, and has stolen into the house?"

"Could a stranger get into the house without your knowing?"

"I suppose if he came early enough to get upstairs before we were about he could turn the handle of the front door and walk in?"

Campbell shook his head.

"I don't believe anyone would run such a risk."

"But—"

"Well?"

"If not, it must be someone in the house, and you and I are the only strangers here."

Campbell smiled cheerfully.

"No one will suspect us, dear Mrs. Arnold. We have not nursed him back from the gates of Death to poison him. I implore you keep this wretched business from Lady Lyndon. It would be torture to her."

"Then you think—"

He answered nothing, but she knew the same idea was in both their minds—that the culprit was beautiful, fascinating Paulina Lyndon!

CHAPTER XII.

WHEN Lady Elton discovered that Mr. Arnison had been meeting her niece clandestinely her anger knew no bounds; and her first impulse was to go straight home and demand his immediate dismissal, knowing perfectly well that though the Earl liked him as his boy's tutor, he would certainly object to him as a prospective nephew, and therefore be on her side.

Only two thoughts held her back. It was impossible to dismiss Philip Arnison without some reason.

The guests at the Park, who had noticed their host's partiality for him, would certainly be curious at his abrupt departure, and the

fact of his attachment to Miss Lyndon must come out.

It seemed to poor Lady Elton she cast a slur on her sister's child if she let the world suspect that Paulina had stolen out alone night after night to meet her lover.

The other motive for silence was yet more urgent. With Mr. Arnison at the Park, and Paulina with her mother, the romance could proceed no further for the present; but if sent away in disgrace, what was to prevent the tutor from putting up at some hotel at Garby, and prosecuting his suit, while Lady Lyndon was busy nursing her stepson, or even luring Paulina up to London, and persuading her to consent to a private marriage?

No; so long as Mr. Arnison was at the Park at least Paulina was safe; and so, though it went sorely against the grain with her, the Countess kept the secret of his misdoings, and tried her best to show nothing of her displeasure when she was in his company.

Life seemed very troubled to Lady Elton at this time, for the mysterious disappearance of her papers she had received from the old housekeeper was still unexplained.

The day of Susan's funeral Lady Elton shut herself up in her boudoir, and made a careful search through every drawer of her cabinet in vain. There was not the slightest sign of any papers; and but for the fact that her little boy Noel had declared he saw her put them in the drawer, poor Lady Elton would have tried to believe the whole affair was an hallucination of her own brain.

The old servant was buried in the village churchyard, and the Earl himself attended her funeral.

Sanders, who had been her kind and careful nurse, knew more of her than any other person, but even she had been little in Susan's confidence.

"I never heard her speak of any relations of late years, my lady," said the maid, when questioned. "She had some cousins out Brixon way, but they emigrated some years ago; for I remember her saying they might as well be dead as go out to the antipodes. To the best of my belief there was no one else belonging to her."

Lady Elton appealed to her husband. She had found Susan in possession of the keys when she came home a bride, but it was possible he knew something of the old woman's antecedents.

The Earl shook his head.

"My mother picked her up when she was at the seaside. There were two young women, cousins or sisters, I forget which, and she took a fancy to the elder. I don't know what became of the other, and I am quite sure Mrs. Smith had no more relations. She was an orphan, and that is more than forty years ago!"

Lady Elton sighed.

"What's the matter?" demanded the Earl. "Surely the poor thing's few possessions don't trouble you? Just put them in a big trunk, and keep them till you hear from the cousin. If the death is in the papers she may see it and write."

But though the death of "Susan Smith, for forty years' servant and friend in the family of Lord Elton," was duly chronicled, no one ever wrote to inquire particulars.

The Countess herself looked over the small property of the late housekeeper, but there was nothing to throw any light on her death-bed confidence.

A post office savings' book, an album with half a dozen portraits, evidently of one family, and, perhaps half a dozen Melbourne newspapers, that was all Susan had left behind her.

"Her mind must have been wandering," decided Lady Elton. "What could there be in her past to have injured Basil? What would that wretched lost packet have told him that he would have cared to know. It was just the fancy of a delirious brain? She was fond of him as a child, and she wanted to see him again, and so she brooded over it until she

imagined she had something important to tell him."

Thus my lady strove to dismiss the subject, though it must be confessed there were times when it haunted her thoughts most unpleasantly.

The presence of her little nieces gave her very little time for melancholy musings. They were all bright, lively children, and the Countess soon discovered that they were not particularly attached to their eldest sister, and that the two school-girls, Blanche and Florence, quite suspected her liking for Mr. Arnison.

"It began ever so long ago," Floss told her aunt, simply, "while we were at Tours. Mr. Arnison used to be always coming to see us, and he always called Paulina 'Princess.' Then when we came to England she seemed quite lost and mopy, till he appeared one day, and then she got cheerful again.

Lady Elton smiled. Evidently in the eyes of the little girls being engaged was a great cause for cheerfulness.

"You must never talk of this again," she said, gravely. "I am sure your mother would not like you to say such things."

"Mother does not like Mr. Arnison," said Blanche, demurely; "but Paulina says that is because she is old-fashioned and prejudiced. Paulina says people are much nicer when they don't go about boring everyone with their family history."

Lady Elton was rather amused at this naive description of her niece's feelings. She was very anxious for news from Glenfriggs. She feared Paulina's influence with her mother was unlimited, and would not have been surprised had she talked Lady Lyndon over into believing Mr. Arnison an ideal son-in-law.

For that gentleman himself Lady Elton was beginning to entertain a marked aversion. Why did he confide to her Lord Chesney's desire that he should marry the heiress of The Towers, when all the while he was in love with Paulina?

Why did he entertain her with his whole family pedigree, so much of it, at least, as proved his relationship to the Chesneys, when she took not the least interest in the subject? While her sister's one complaint against him had been that he never mentioned his relations?

A surprise was in store for her. Paulina had only left the Hall three days when, returning from a long drive, the Countess came on her husband with a very perturbed face.

"Really, Juliet, if you fill the house with other people's children you might keep them in order. Here's your boy lost a valuable tutor through those monkeys!"

"What can you mean?"

When she heard she by no means blamed the girls so much as Lord Elton expected. It seemed they had written a joint letter to their mother, and left it on the hall table while they went to ask their aunt for a stamp.

The Countess being out they hunted through the reception rooms in vain, and when they came back disconsolately to the hall they found Mr. Arnison with their letter in his hands.

The tutor's version was that the wind had thrown it on the ground, and he picked it up thinking it would get dusty; but both girls protested he had read it.

Florence declared she saw him fastening the flap of the envelope. Blanche, without enforcing this charge, maintained that the envelope had certainly been opened.

The Earl appeared suddenly on the scene, and both parties appealed to him. He took the tutor's side, and ordered the children to apologise, which they both refused to do.

"I am sure that he has read it," said Floss, defiantly. "He turned red when we asked him!"

Whereupon Philip Arnison declared he had been insulted, and would leave Elton Park. Not all the Earl's persuasions could turn him from his purpose, and he had actually left the house before Lady Elton arrived.

It was in vain that she tried to reprove the children; both felt a suspicion she sympathised with them.

"You know, aunty," maintained Floss, stoutly, "he had a reason for wanting to read my letter, and I am sure he did!"

The Earl looked amused. His first anger over he could see the ludicrous side of the affair.

"You concealed child!" he exclaimed, pinching her playfully. "Pray, why should a clever, grown-up man like Mr. Arnison want to read your letter?"

"He isn't very much grown-up," said Floss. "Nurse says he'll never make a fire man. Of course he wanted to read my letter because he was afraid I should tell mamma."

"Tell her what?" demanded the Earl.

And then it came out. Philip Arnison, perhaps, fearing his own writing was known to Lady Lyndon, had tried to bribe the two little sisters to write to Paulina, and enclose a note from himself.

He had offered Floss a bright new florin and Blanche a box of chocolate creams, both of which had been indignantly refused.

"And when was this?"

"Last night. Don't you believe now, Uncle Elton, he opened our letter?"

"I confess it looks like it," said the peer to his wife. "What an idiot a man makes of himself when he is in love."

"I don't think it was a love-letter," said Floss, seriously. "It didn't look like one."

"Do you mean you read it?"

"I put it in my pocket," returned the child. "I was cross, and I wanted to pay him out. I don't mind showing it to you, Uncle Elton."

"I think your aunt will understand it better," replied the peer. "Love letters are not much in my line."

But when Lady Elton looked at the crumpled sheet she quite agreed with Floss that it did not sound much like a love-letter. She read it twice through, feeling more and more bewildered.

"If the fortune is to be saved it must be saved quickly. If you cannot manage M. A. let me know, and I will try another method. Surely after all your protestations you are not turning faint-hearted? The secret is there, and you can find it out if you only try."

"He must be mad!" said Lord Elton, looking over his wife's shoulder, "or else this letter was not intended for Paulina at all."

"It was meant for her," declared Floss. "It was in a little white envelope small enough to go inside mine, and sealed with blue wax. Mr. Arnison was furious when I wouldn't give it back, and called me a mean thief! I don't think I should have read it only when we saw him with our letter, Blanche and I thought he ought to be punished."

"You can go, children," said the Earl, with a meaning glance at his wife. "My dear," he added, when the little girls were out of hearing, "I am thankful we have no daughters if they would have been as troublesome as Paulina."

"Then you think——"

"I think Arnison is a scoundrel, and that those little maids have done us a service in getting rid of him."

But how great a scoundrel, how thoroughly a deceiver, the Earl of Elton never even suspected.

(To be continued.)

In New Zealand they have "travelling banks." A clerk representing the bank travels up and down a railway line for the transaction of the business of the bank with those who cannot come into the city. Laden with a bag or trunk containing his supply of cash, and provided with adequate precautions against robbery, the clerk makes the compartment his headquarters, and changes cheques or takes deposits at the stations where the train stops.

ALETHEA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER IX.

Alas! the breast that inly bleeds
Hath naught to care from outward blow!
—Byron.

I've seen and heard
Enough, beyond suspicion a pale distrust,
To damn me with the knowledge of my fate.
—Beckingham.

MASTER ARTHUR put his hand confidently into that of Lord Waldemere's, who could have crushed it had he so chosen. But there was something in the trust and sympathy of the noble little fellow that appealed to his lordship's heart, and he could as soon have harmed an innocent dove as that equally innocent child.

Arthur repeated his invitation to the Marquis to enter the cottage, and the latter accepted it, muttering—

"There'll be no one there who knows me, of course, and I may learn more about this boy and his parents. Yes, I'll enter the cottage!"

As they approached it, a young yet manly woman came out upon the steps of the porch, looking over the lawn with an anxious glance, which changed to one of terror and dismay as it encountered Arthur and his companion.

"For Heaven's sake!" she ejaculated, sinking upon the bench at one side of the portico. "What does this mean? Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

She wrung her hands piteously, and then sprang up, exclaiming—

"Master Arthur! Come here quick! Oh, hasten!"

The lad sprang forward, wondering at her evident alarm, and she caught his arm, crying—

"Run into your room, Master Arthur, and lock the door! Oh! if your mother were only here! Do go in. This gentleman is your enemy——"

"My enemy?" repeated the boy, gravely, regarding the Marquis earnestly. "You must be mistaken, nurse. Who should hate me? But if he is my enemy, I can defend myself." And he doubled his hand into what he deemed an awe-inspiring fist.

"Go into your room, I beg of you, Master Arthur," pleaded the woman. "For your mother's sake——"

Moved by her great distress, and the last argument she had used, the boy bowed quietly and passed into the house.

It was evident that a plea made to him in his mother's name was irresistible.

During this colloquy, the Marquis had looked at the woman with growing recognition, and he now said, enceringly—

"I believe I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Wycherly's former maid. Is it not so?"

The woman hesitated, apparently tempted to deny the fact, and then she answered—

"You are right, my lord!"

"It is quite a surprise to find you here, Mary," pursued his lordship, with pretended carelessness. "I am visiting at Wycherly Castle, and, while riding this morning, discovered that I had lost my way. Does this lane connect with the lower road?"

"It does, my lord," replied Mary, in tones of relief.

She arose, but the Marquis made no movement towards departing. Looking around him curiously, he said—

"You have a very pleasant home here, Mary. You must have married well to have become the mistress of such a gem of a cottage!"

The woman's face became flushed, and she looked anxious, but replied, with assumed volubility—

"Yes, my lord, I made a very good marriage, considering that I was only a lady's maid. I married John Perkins, the village

schoolmaster. He is a farmer now, and has been since our marriage!"

"Then this place of yours belongs to Miss Wycherly?"

Mary assented.

"Miss Wycherly must have been greatly attached to you," observed Lord Waldemere, watching the embarrassed looks of the farmer's wife. "She fitted up the cottage for you with those handsome windows and costly curtains, and with these picturesque porches, did she not?"

The woman answered reluctantly in the affirmative.

"I thought so. You are happy in having the friendship of such a benevolent lady," said the Marquis, sarcastically. "Are those children yours?"

Mary looked fondly upon the little group on the lawn, playing with their new presents, and answered in the affirmative.

"And the boy who conducted me hither, is he yours?" inquired his lordship, observing her keenly.

"Yes, yes, my lord," was the eager reply.

"Indeed! He does not resemble in the least those apple-faced children yonder! Your children are rosy, sturdy little creatures, Mary, quite worthy of your maternal pride, but this eldest boy looks like a young prince!"

"But he is mine, my lord, my own!" cried Mary, vehemently.

"Indeed! Yet you call him 'Master Arthur,' and expressed a wish that his mother were here?"

Poor Mary was quite overwhelmed at this reminder, and took refuge in a burst of tears.

"You need not grieve, Mary, because I have discovered the truth," said the Marquis, unmoved by her grief. "I know who the boy is, and who his parents are—"

"You do!"

"I do! His parents left here but a few minutes since," and his lordship's tones became so stern that the farmer's wife shrank before him in deadly fear. "He bears his mother's face and his father's name. Heaven grant that he may not curse them both when he grows older—even as I curse them now!"

He moved abruptly away, while Mary retreated to the cottage to give way to the grief that possessed her, and to assure herself that her young nurling was safe in his room.

The Marquis paused under the bay-window, the curtains of which were fluttering in the gentle breeze, and glanced into the room it lighted.

It was a pretty little drawing room, tenanted only by the boy Arthur, who, half reclining upon a sofa, with his cheek nestling in one palm, was looking over one of his books, yet with a strange, abstracted expression that showed his thoughts were wandering.

The room evidently belonged exclusively to him, the table being loaded with boyish trinkets, the mantelpiece bearing a large-sized and perfectly formed model of a steamship, and a little bookcase in the corner being well filled with books that boys love.

The furniture would not have been out of place at the Castle, and through a half-open door the Marquis caught sight of a pretty, white-draped bedroom.

"She likes to surround her child with pleasant objects to look upon!" thought his lordship, bitterly. "His prison is a gilded one!"

He scanned the pictures on the white-papered walls and observed two companion portraits over the mantelpiece.

They were the portraits of Miss Wycherly and Richard Layne.

As he recognised them the Marquis groaned aloud.

Arthur heard that expression of anguish and looked up, encountering the gaze of that dark, stern face at his window.

Instead of being frightened he approached the Marquis quietly, threw open the window still farther, and demanded,—

"Are you my enemy, as my nurse says?"

"Yes—no—I don't know!"

The little fellow looked puzzled and distressed, then, without a word, he bent forward and kissed his lordship's bearded lips.

With that innocent caress burning his mouth, the Marquis turned from the spot and hastened to the nook where he had left his horse.

The next moment he had mounted and was dashing down the lane at a furious pace.

Near the end of the secluded avenue he met a farmer-looking man, whom he conjectured to be John Perkins himself, from his look of anxiety and surprise at seeing a stranger so near the hidden cottage; but his lordship rode swiftly past him, turned into the Castle road, and proceeded eastward.

"I am tempted to go away from this place," he muttered, when the tumult of his feelings had somewhat subsided. "Yet what should I gain by such a step? I scarcely suffered less in my Welsh hermitage than I have suffered here—till this morning! This last revelation has almost wrecked my reason. It was an awful blow, all the worse for being unsuspected! Would that I could wring Alethea Wycherly's heart as she wrung mine! Would that I could wreak upon her and him all the hatred that has been gathering in my heart during these miserable years of my wrecked life! Would that I could wreak upon them both the vengeance, the bitterness, the loathing that fills my soul!"

A lurid gleam shot through his stormy eyes, and his lips compressed themselves in a hard, merciless expression.

"I will stay," he resumed—"stay to make them both suffer as they deserve. They shall learn that an avenging Nemesis is no poetical fable, but a stern and awful reality!"

He set his lips still more firmly together, and rode on in silence.

The towers of the Castle, which had been visible to him since entering the lower road, soon arose before him at a brief distance in their majesty, and he did not speak again, even to his faithful steed, until he had reached the great gates, up the avenue, and alighted upon the portico.

A groom was in waiting to take charge of the steed, and Lord Waldemere proceeded to his own apartment, in which he secluded himself for several hours.

When he emerged from it, making his way to the drawing-room, he found that the younger guests, with Lady Leopold, were gone to ride, that Mrs. Braithwaite had retired for a siesta, and that Miss Wycherly was nowhere to be seen.

This state of affairs suited his mood better than to engage in social intercourse, and he wandered about, finally taking refuge in the library, where some ancient romantic volumes engaged his attention.

He had been thus occupied but a brief period, when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the gravelled avenue, and looked from the window in the expectation of witnessing the return of the riders.

Instead of a gay group, he beheld the same farmer-looking man he had encountered near the hidden cottage, and he smiled as he realised that Mary Perkins had probably sent him to Miss Wycherly with full details of his lordship's recent visit and interview with her.

Half an hour afterwards the man rode away again, and he had scarcely entered the road before the party of riders arrived.

Lord Waldemere watched the group idly for a few moments, and then dashed aside his book, and began walking the floor in an impetuous way peculiar to himself.

He was thus engaged when the library door opened, and Miss Wycherly, magnificently arrayed, swept into the apartment.

She had never looked more cold and haughty, and, although she started slightly at meeting Lord Waldemere there, there was not the faintest flush upon her cheek, not the slightest confusion or consciousness in her manner.

Never more than at that moment had she merited the name of "iceberg."

She had never looked more cold and haughty, and, although she started slightly at meeting Lord Waldemere there, there was not the faintest flush upon her cheek, not the slightest confusion or consciousness in her manner.

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Never more than at that moment had she merited the name of "iceberg."

"Excuse me, my lord," she said, in her even, icy tones; "I did not know your lordship was here, or I would not have disturbed you!"

She passed him, going up to the shelves on the opposite wall, from the stores of books upon which she selected the one of which she was in quest.

"Nothing that you can do, Miss Wycherly, has power to disturb," responded the Marquis.

Miss Wycherly replied only by arching her perfect brows, and turning to quit the apartment.

"Do not be in such haste, madam," said his lordship, intercepting her course. "To look at you now, and every day, one would not think that under all that ice you carry a heart. With the rest of the world, I have always believed you heartless—always still now!"

"Then your opinion has changed, my lord?"

"It has. I now believe that you have a heart that may be wrong, as mine has been. Mr. Perkins has been here?"

"Yes," was the composed answer. "He married one of my personal attendants, to whom I was much attached, and I have let them a small farm which belongs to me. He comes not unfrequently to the Castle for advice and assistance, for Mary, although as old as I am, has great reverence for my judgment, particularly in affairs concerning the children. I dare say you noticed the little ones, my lord. The girl is called Alethea, or Ally!"

"Ally!" murmured the Marquis, with quivering lips.

"Yes. That is the pet name I used to bear, as you may remember," said Miss Wycherly, as coldly as before. "I am the child's god-mother."

"Perhaps you can tell me the boys' names?"

"Certainly. Richard and Johnny—"

"And Arthur!"

"Yes, Arthur. He is the eldest!"

"But Mary Perkins is not his mother, Alethea Wycherly! Do you suppose I could look upon that lad and not trace your features in his face? Do you suppose I do not know that he is your child, yours and Richard Layne's?"

Miss Wycherly paled slightly, but made no response.

"You do not deny it! You are wise enough to see that a denial would not avail you in the least. I have seen young Arthur Layne, and I say with you," and his lordship's tones grew sneering, "that it is a pity that you cannot own him to the world as your son!"

Miss Wycherly started and grew still more pale, a strangely weary expression gathering about her closely shut lips, but her eyes assumed a defiant look.

"Mr. Perkins has probably informed you that I spoke unguardedly to his wife about your son; nevertheless, these creatures of yours will fully understand the child's parentage, and she made no attempt to deny my assertion. There is one thing Mr. Perkins did not tell you, Miss Wycherly, and that is, that I was an observer and listener to the entire scene between yourself and your boy!"

So the Marquis of Waldemere has taken up the fitting occupation of spy and eaves-dropper!" said the lady, scornfully.

"I do not care to justify myself in your sight, Miss Wycherly, yet I will say that I came upon that cottage by accident, and without any previous knowledge of it. When I rode, I went in an opposite direction to that taken by you and your friend. I returned by way of the narrow lane upon which the hidden cottage is situated, and stopped to inquire my way. Before I had time to emerge from the shadow of the trees you came out from the cottage, where you had been holding an interview with Layne, and called your son by his father's name. I witnessed the scene that followed, and I need not say I was as much

surprised at your affection for your son as I was by the existence of that son!"

"I do not recognise any right of yours, my lord, in thus addressing me," returned the lady, haughtily. "What is it to you whether that boy whom you saw this morning is mine or not?"

"Nothing—save that I loved you once! Nothing—save that I hate you now, and will wring your heart as you have wrung mine!"

A look of sudden alarm flattered Miss Wycherly's face, as if she apprehended harm to Arthur; but it quickly disappeared, as she said—

"You cannot wring my heart. In one thing only, my lord, I am vulnerable, and I know you cannot injure Arthur. Even you would not have the heart to touch one hair of that boy's head—even you could not be cruel enough to bring one tear to his innocent eyes!"

"Could I not—when that one tear of his would cause you a thousand pangs, a thousand tears?" cried his lordship, savagely.

A look of resolution gathered in Miss Alethea's countenance, and it was her only reply.

"Tell me, Alethea Wycherly, are you the wife of Richard Layne? If you have entered into a secret marriage with him I may be tempted to go away and leave you alone. Tell me the truth!"

"I decline to be catechised by your lordship. As well might Sir Wilton Werner presume upon his attentions to me to search my heart for its hidden secrets. Our relations, henceforth, my lord, will be restricted to the simplest salutations. If you had a single spark of manhood you would not obtrude your presence here another hour. If I had a brother, or other protector, you know you would not venture to remain here a single minute!"

"Could you not call upon Mr. Layne to put me out?" inquired the Marquis, ironically. "Or would the proceeding cause too much scandal to be tolerated by your guests?"

Miss Wycherly made no reply, but swept haughtily from the room.

When he found himself alone Lord Waldemere's mocking look fled, and he looked the fool, and flung himself upon a couch, sobbing passionately in an abandonment of awful grief.

CHAPTER X.

Jealousy, said'st thou? I disdain it:—no—
Distrust is poor, and a misplac'd suspicion
Invites, and justifies the falsehood feared.

—Hill's Zara.

Even after the scene he had witnessed in the fountain glade, Basil Montmaur had not been able to doubt the lady of his love, or her truth and fidelity to him. But he had been strangely troubled, nevertheless. The moonlight that had lighted up her features turned her glittering golden hair to an encircling halo, and revealed so perfectly her slender form, had convinced him that it was Lady Leopolde herself whom he had seen at Lord Templecombe's side, whose lips he had seen pressed upon his lordship's brow.

"Why should I be troubled?" he asked himself, uneasily, as he gazed upon the glade from which they had vanished. "Leopolde and Vane are cousins, and she has always regarded him as a brother. Perhaps she is with him now to tell him of her engagement to me, and her kiss was but an expression of sisterly sympathy."

Not entirely satisfied with this ingenious explanation, yet fancying himself so, Basil quitted the marble urn against which he had leaned, and walked about the garden for a long time, absorbed in his thoughts.

When at length he returned to the Castle drawing-room, he was surprised to find Lady Leopolde the life of the company, and with nothing in her manner to show that she had left the dwelling at all during the evening.

He noticed that she wore on her breast a spray of freshly gathered hot-house flowers, and that a scarlet flower trailed on her snowy neck from the glittering masses of her hair.

Lord Templecombe was not present at the moment of Basil's entrance, but he soon made his appearance, with the marks of recent agitation still lingering upon his features. He was unusually quiet during the evening, yet his bearing towards Lady Leopolde was not that of a suitor who has proposed marriage and been rejected.

He had never been more assiduous in his intentions to his lovely cousin than on that evening, but his manner was subdued, and he frequently started on being addressed, as if his thoughts had wandered far from the subject under discussion.

Eager and impatient as he felt for an explanation of the evening's scene Basil found no opportunity to converse with his betrothed, although he eagerly sought it. He managed to whisper a request that she would linger in the drawing-room after the retirement of the guests, but Leopolde shook her head absently, enjoining him to wait until the morrow.

The next day, therefore, at the very moment when Lord Waldemere started forth on his ride, in the direction opposite to that taken by Miss Wycherly and Richard Layne, Basil entered the picture-gallery, where he was soon joined by his betrothed.

He was very grave, but not less tender than usual, as he folded her in his arms and kissed her with loving reverence; then leading her to a seat where the morning light streamed upon her fair young head, yet leaving her face in shadow.

"You look weary this morning, Basil," said Leopolde, noting his gravity. "Did you not sleep well last night?"

"I was rather wakeful, darling," answered Basil.

"You look troubled too. Have you any anxieties, Basil? If so, let me share them with you!"

"I will share them with you, dear Leopolde. I have been foolish, perhaps, to allow myself to be troubled by an incident that to you looked, probably, the most natural thing in the world. Women are more impulsive, and these things look differently to them than to men—"

"I don't understand you, Basil," and Lady Leopolde opened her purple eyes in genuine astonishment. "Have I done something wrong?"

"No, my darling!" and her lover pressed her hands to his lips. "Your look of surprise shows me that your motives were irreproachable. Indeed, I did not doubt that fact. But you do not know Vane as I know him. He is utterly heartless, I think, and would not scruple to boast of your acceptance of his attentions if he made no attempt to injure you for refusing him!"

"But I have not refused him, Basil!"

"You have not refused him?" and a look of pain appeared on Montmaur's face, as his mind recalled the kiss that had been given Lord Templecombe. "Then, as your betrothed husband, I beg you to grant him no more private interviews, and to place him upon the same terms with you henceforth as Sir Wilton Werner," added Basil, in a firmer tone.

"You quite puzzle me, Basil. I do not understand your meaning. I cannot be colder to Vane, for he does not presume upon his cousinly relations with me, and has not yet spoken a word of love to me. I have never encouraged him—"

"Never? Do you know so little of the world as to consider a private meeting and a kiss no encouragement to a lover?"

"A meeting and a kiss? Explain yourself!" and there was a slight hauteur in the voice of Lady Leopolde, even while her lips quivered with a softer emotion. "Oh, Basil, how can you believe such things of me?"

"I believed only what I saw," answered

Basil, gently. "I had a conversation with Vane yesterday in the garden, and I wished to talk with you about it. No opportunity presented itself until evening, when I missed you from the drawing room, and imagined that you had gone for some flowers—"

"And so I had, Basil. Did you not see them in my hair afterwards?"

"Yes. I caught you in the garden, to continue my story, but, not finding you there, was about to return to the Castle, when I beheld Vane enter the fountain-glade and seat himself to smoke a cigar. The moonlight streamed full upon him, and I could not have been mistaken in his identity!"

"You are no doubt right, Basil, for cousin Vane frequently goes to the fountain-glade after dinner for a quiet hour with his cigar!"

Basil looked searchingly into Leopolde's face, with his grave, dark eyes, and then he continued,—

"He had been seated there but a few minutes when a young girl came out of the shadow surrounding the circular glade, and approached him. She bent over him and kissed him. He sprang to his feet, dashed away his cigar, and the next moment they had passed into the shadow together, and the glade was deserted!"

"Is not this a last night's dream?" inquired Lady Leopolde, wonderingly.

"No, darling. Would that it were! I saw the face of the young girl fully and distinctly—and it was yours!"

"Mine!"

"Yes. I recognised you in a moment!"

"But, Basil," cried the maiden, "I was not there! Do you think I would steal out to the glade to meet my cousin? Why should I bestow upon him a caress, when I know that he is a suitor for my hand?" and a scarlet flush illumined her cheeks.

Basil was astonished at this denial, and looked into the eyes of his betrothed as if he would read her very soul.

"My darling," he said, with grave tenderness. "I beg your pardon for having even fancied that you cherished a more than cousinly feeling for Vane. I do not doubt your denial. How can I? Yet there is some mystery in this affair of last evening that I cannot understand. I was sure I saw you, and you wore that grey robe you had on yesterday, and which I thought so becoming to you. Could I have been the victim of hallucination?"

"You must have been, for it was not me whom you saw. I was absent from the drawing room but a few minutes, and I went no farther than the conservatory!"

Basil would not urge the subject farther.

He was not satisfied that the scene he had witnessed was but an illusion, but his gaze into Leopolde's clear, unflinching eyes had convinced him of her truth and sincerity, and he resolved to dismiss the unpleasant topic from his mind, if possible, for dwelling upon it would only serve to further mystify him.

"Since Vane's companion in the glade was not yourself, dearest," he said, lightly, "we will forget that he was there, and turn our attention to the communication I wished to make to you yesterday. His lordship informed me that there was a secret engagement existing between you and himself—"

"But you did not believe it?"

"Of course not. Could I doubt my almost-wife? I wished you to know what he said, however, that you might govern yourself accordingly. Do not see him again alone, nor give him the slightest pretence upon which to frame such false declarations!"

"I will not, if I can avoid it. Vane's suit has the approval of Aunt Alethea, still I know she would not wish me to marry him if I preferred another!"

"But not knowing that you have any preference for another she may encourage Vane. I wish you would permit me to declare our engagement to Miss Alethea, darling. She

will guard the secret until you are willing it should be made known!"

"Tell her if you think best," answered Leopold, thoughtfully. "It is, perhaps, not right to keep our betrothal from her knowledge. Cold and haughty as she is, she has yet been always thoughtful of my welfare, and ever desirous for my happiness. Sometimes I think she even loves me, although she never kissed me but once. At any rate, she is my guardian, and stands towards me in the relation of a mother, although she is scarcely ten years older than I am. Yes, Basil, you may tell her our secret!"

The lover was overjoyed at this consent.

A pleasant, tender conversation succeeded, which was continued until Leopold declared, blushing and laughingly, that it was time to prepare for their ride, and that her guests would be wondering at her prolonged absence.

And then they separated, meeting soon after upon the portico, both attired for the ride.

Most of the guests had assembled, and some were already mounted; among the others, Lady Ellen Haigh, whose habit had quite opportunely arrived half an hour before.

Mrs. Braithwaite watched her daughters mount, and, to his lordship's chagrin, detained the Earl of Templecombe with her praises of Lady Leopold's beauty and grace, so that Basil Montmaur had the pleasure of assisting his betrothed to her saddle and constituting himself her particular escort.

The Earl at length broke away from good Mrs. Braithwaite with ill-concealed impatience, finding himself the last to mount, and the attendant of Lady Ellen Haigh and Miss Emily Braithwaite.

Sir Wilton Werner exchanged a glance of commiseration with his lordship, arching his brows peculiarly, and then devoted himself to the timid Feodora.

All constraint soon disappeared under the pleasant influences of the summer morning, and the party of riders soon lost all regularity of grouping, riding abreast or in one large group, as chance dictated.

They took their course to the eastward, thus avoiding an encounter with Lord Waldemere; and, each and all being in the best of spirits, their gay voices rang out on the air like sweet music.

They were passing a plantation belonging to the estate when a white, half veiled face looked out from the mass of greenery, and a pair of wild, blue eyes regarded the riders.

At that moment Basil Montmaur and Lord Templecombe were side by side, slightly in advance of the rest of the group.

They had been conversing with Lady Leopold, but she had shattered her pace to speak to Miss Braithwaite, and her rivals were thus left prominently in the foreground.

The concealed girl seemed to see no one but those two prominent figures, and she shrank still farther amongst the shrubbery, as if fearful of observation, and turned to a woodman, who, hatchet in hand, stood beside her.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, "tell me who is that handsome gentleman in front? The one a little in advance?"

"That handsome un bees Mister Montmaur," was the response, and the woodman looked boldly after the merry riders as they swept gallantly along the road. "A fine gentleman he bees, and a Wycherly besides, bees Basil Montmaur!"

The girl leaned heavily against the tree, and her veil swept momentarily aside, revealing her tearful, defiant face.

It was that of Natalie Afton!

"You are sure his name is Basil Montmaur?" she asked, in faint tones.

"Sure! Well, it bees and it beesn't. His name's Wycherly, but he took his mother's name to git a fortin', and quite right, I say, though, after all, the old name bees better than all the fortins in the world, to my thinkin'." Other gentleman bees my lord, the Earl of Templecombe. It's likely my lady'll marry one of 'em. But you was askin' the way to

the village. You jest have to keep ahead and follow them!" and the woodman nodded after the disappearing group.

Natalie thanked him and entered the road, tottering in the direction indicated, while he returned to his work of lopping off superfluous branches, giving no further thought to the young girl he had encountered in the plantation, and who had inquired of him her way.

When she had passed beyond the woodman's sight she again entered the plantation, sought the shade of a dense thicket, and sobbed,—

"That was Elmer Keyes, my husband! So his real name is Basil Montmaur, and he is a claimant for the hand of that proud lady, whose face was turned from me! Heaven help me in my efforts to obtain justice! I will dog his every footstep until I obtain it!"

A resolute look shone through her tears, and then she gave way to renewed sobbing.

She still lay in the thicket when the riders returned, and she looked out upon them with a strange gaze, marking the face of Lady Leopold.

The party were quite unconscious of such observation, and chatted gaily as they passed, and among them all none were more gay than the rival suitors for the hand of the lady of the Castle.

Basil in the excitement of the ride had forgotten all his trouble in regard to the mystery of the previous evening and given himself up to the pleasure of the hour with boyish zest.

Although Lady Leopold forbore to treat her cousin with marked coldness, Lord Templecombe had not failed to perceive a difference in her manner towards him. Unfortunately, he ascribed it to a feeling of pique because he had not yet offered her his hands and title, after his declaration to her aunt, and his self love was immensely flattered at the thought.

As they alighted at the Castle portico he sprang forward to assist her from her saddle, and pressed her hand fervently.

As she passed into the hall he whispered to Sir Wilton Werner,—

"Before another twenty-four hours have elapsed I shall be able to declare my engagement to Lady Leopold. Congratulate me, my dear fellow!"

"Not too soon!" was the cool reply. "Don't be too precipitate!"

The Earl smiled complacently and went up to his room.

When the family circle again met in the drawing room, Basil Montmaur observed that Lord Templecombe made frequent attempts to secure a *à-dé-tête* with Lady Leopold, and he also observed how skillfully the maiden frustrated his endeavours.

When they retired that night the Earl's fate was still undecided.

In his own room, as the hours grew late, Basil Montmaur's thoughts resorted to the mystery of which he had resolved never again to think and, with a glow of love and trust, he mused,—

"Yes, I must have been the victim of hallucination last evening. If that young girl was not Leopold, it follows that there was no young girl there, for I saw—or seemed to see—her features, her hair, her very dress that she wore yesterday. Strange illusion!"

He thought upon the subject for a long time, and then he mused upon the glorious beauty and goodness of his betrothed, and this theme proved inexhaustible.

He felt wakeful and heeded not the hours as they flew onward, until at last he heard the great hall clock chime the hour of one.

That sound had scarcely died on the air when he heard a faint noise as of a footstep on the corridor.

Without waiting to account for it by any one of the natural explanations that would have suggested themselves at any other moment, he arose, crossed the floor, and opened the door.

By the dim light that crept in through the diamond paneled Gothic window at the end of the corridor, he beheld a young girl, with

golden hair streaming over her shoulders, moving softly past his door.

She wore a fleecy grey robe that fitted her form perfectly, and there was a spray of scarlet lilies at her throat—the flower that Leopold was fond of wearing.

Basil looked upon her fair, sweet face, at the pure gold of her hair, and whispered,—

"Leopold!"

That whisper could not reach her hearing, she continuing her stealthy march onwards.

"Could she be asleep?" Basil asked himself, fearing to arouse her by an ungrated movement. "Was Leopold a somnambulist? Her apartments were not situated upon this floor. What could she be doing there at this hour of the night?"

His questions were soon answered.

First, by her movements, his frequent pauses, and the absence of any fixeness in her gaze, he decided that she was broad awake.

That discovery brought a chill with it.

If she was not a somnambulist, why did she act so strangely?

She quitted the broad corridor, turning as if undecided, into a narrow passage, and then into another—Basil stealing after her; and then she paused at the door of the western tower chamber—the room assigned to the Earl of Templecombe!

She looked around her to assure herself that her movements were unnoticed, then she turned the door knob, finding that the door was unlocked, and the next moment she had entered his lordship's chamber, closing the door after her.

Basil was stupefied, and almost tempted to rush after her and bring her back; but wiser thoughts prevailed.

Returning to his room, he sought in vain a solution of the mystery.

It was impossible to doubt Lady Leopold, yet he felt convinced that it was her whom he had seen.

He recalled to his mind a German legend he had once read of a "double" who had haunted a lady, appearing in places where she was not, and he was almost ready to believe that Leopold was haunted by a phantom of herself, in the same manner.

Was this being he had seen her double? or, after all, was Leopold a somnambulist?

CHAPTER XI.

I stand like one

Has lost his way, and no man near him to inquire
it of:

Yet there's a Providence above that knows
The roads that ill men tread, and can direct
Inquiring justice: the passengers that travel
In the wide ocean, where no paths are,
Look up, and leave their conduct to a star.

—Sir Robert Hurd.

At the moment when the bewildered Basil Montmaur was following the form of his supposed betrothed to the door of Lord Templecombe's chamber, in the western tower, a no less interesting scene was transpiring at Miss Wycherly's apartments.

The eastern tower was brilliantly lighted by hanging lamps, the light of which shimmered mellowly through ground glass globes. The curtains were drawn, the *jalousies* tightly closed before the windows, one of which was partly raised to admit the evening air.

The folding-doors connecting the boudoir, or parlour, from the inner chamber were half open, and the latter room was shown to be even more luxurious than the former, being fitted with musical instruments, costly trinkets, rare shells, &c. An alcove at one side contained a dainty white draped bed, surrounded by full, fleecy curtains of transparent texture, which depended from a gilt couch near the ceiling.

Miss Wycherly was seated at an inlaid waiting-table in this beautiful chamber, busy with her pen.

She had laid aside her evening dress, and was attired in a loose-fitting dressing-gown of white cashmere, and her dark hair was brushed smoothly away from her forehead.

She had signed and sealed the missive which she had just penned, when a door, carefully fitted into the wall beyond the alcove, and not to be distinguished by a careless eye from the wall itself, was opened, and Miss Wycherly's faithful nurse made her appearance.

"Any sign of them yet, Alison?" inquired the mistress.

"None, my lady. I have been down nearly to the lodge, but they are not in sight!"

Miss Wycherly looked disappointed, and consulted the jewel of watch at her girdle.

"It is past the hour," she said. "I told him to be here at one precisely, for at that time his presence would be least likely to be detected. He was never so late at an appointment before. Can anything have happened?"

"Oh, no, my lady," answered the old nurse, soothingly; "it is all right, only your ladyship's nerves are unbalanced since your last guest came. I can set them right in a few moments!"

She bustled about with the design of distracting her mistress's attention from the hour, and brought from a closet in the wall a massive silver tea-kettle, under which she lighted a spirit lamp.

A tiny silver tea equipage was then put upon the table, a Bérre cup placed to contain the mild beverage in course of preparation, and, in order to fill up the time until the water should boil, Alison assured herself that the door of the ante-chamber communicating with the hall was securely fastened, and that the windows were so arranged as to permit but a single beam of light to penetrate to the outer world.

She then returned to the inner room, and set about infusing a liberal quantity of tea.

"Are the secret chambers all ready, Alison?" inquired Miss Wycherly.

"Yes, my lady!"

"Are you quite sure that there are no flowers in the bedchamber? It is not healthy to have them there!"

"Yes, my lady. I took away the fresh roses and the violets that you sprinkled over the bed this afternoon, and the bouquets I put into the sitting room. Here is your tea, my lady. I am sure it will do you good!" and Alison bore the tray to her mistress.

"Set it down, my good nurse, and go down to my private door. Wait there until you see or hear them. I will not go down to night!"

Alison uttered assent, and retreated through the door by which she had come.

Miss Wycherly sipped her tea, occasionally pausing to listen, but at length she pushed the equipage from her, murmuring anxiously,—

"Can anything have occurred to them? Has the Marquis already put into execution his threats to wound me through my boy? Oh, Heaven—"

She paused, shivering, and glanced wildly around her.

Her suspense had become insupportable, when the concealed door again opened, and Alison entered, followed by John Parkins and his foster-son.

The latter sprang to Miss Wycherly's arms with a cry of joy, and she embraced him with passionate tenderness, folding him to her breast.

"What sleepy eyes!" she said, playfully. "Was mother's boy robbed of his sleep every week to come and visit her?"

"Oh, I don't mind it!" responded Arthur, manfully, his heavy lids contradicting his assertion. "I slept all the way here, mamma, and John had a dreadful time getting me out of the carriage and on my feet. I wouldn't let him carry me!"

Miss Alethea smiled at the boy's proud tone, and then, not minding his faint struggles to regain his feet, carried him to the alcove and

laid him on her pillow, carefully drawing the curtains about him.

"You were later than usual, John?" she said, resuming her seat, while Alison stole to the bedside to watch the lad's slumbers.

"Yes, my lady," answered the farmer, taking the seat Miss Wycherly indicated.

"Master Arthur gave one reason for the delay. My other reason was that I fell asleep about nine, and didn't wake up till after one! I am sorry, my lady—"

"No harm has been done, John. I was anxious, because you are usually so prompt. I feared that the Marquis might have gone back to the hidden cottage, and harmed my boy!"

"He would have had to walk over my dead body before he should have touched one hair of Master Arthur's head!" cried the farmer, glancing fondly in the direction of the now sleeping child. "I am fonder of Master Arthur than of my own children even; and well I may be," he added, "for it is to him that I, my wife, and our little ones owe our prosperity!"

"And Master Arthur is very fond of you!" answered Miss Wycherly, smiling. "I am greatly indebted to you and your good wife, John—as much as you are to me. You have kept his existence secret, treated him always with the respect due to my son and the heir of my property, have taught him all the learning you yourself possess, have made his life very happy, and have never once failed to bring him to me on these secret weekly visits! I owe you more than I can repay, John!"

"I have been more than repaid, my lady!" returned the ex-schoolmaster. "But you said Master Arthur would be your heir. If you were to die, would he succeed to all your property?"

"Yes, John, the hidden cottage excepted. I have made a will in his favour—one that cannot be disputed. But I hope I shall live until he attains his manhood," and Miss Wycherly's tones grew thrilling in their earnestness. "I could not die now! I want to watch over his boyhood and youth, and see him in his manhood! I want to tell him his mother's story with my own lips, so that, whatever he may hear at some future period, he may not blame me or curse my name! However I may have erred, I cannot bear that he should blame me!"

She covered her pale, proud face with her hands for a moment, and then resumed,—

"If I die before he attains his majority, John, Mr. Layne will decide Arthur's future course!"

"I hope and pray you won't die, my lady," and the farmer's voice quivered. "I don't hope it for my own sake, but for your own and Master Arthur's. It would kill him to lose you!"

"Well, we will hope for the best," said Miss Wycherly, with assumed cheerfulness. "I have every reason to believe that I shall live many years yet. I have been thinking lately, John, that you have not been sufficiently rewarded for all your fidelity to me. Arthur will always regard his foster-parents with great affection, and when he comes into my property will love to reward your devotion. But I must not leave everything to be done by him. Here is a small present for you!"

Opening the desk of her writing-table Miss Alethea produced a paper, which she silently handed the farmer.

He opened it, looked it over with a puzzled gaze and then exclaimed,—

"I—I don't understand it, my lady—"

"I will explain it. That paper is a legal document conveying to you and your heirs for ever the hidden cottage and the fifty acres of land comprising the farm upon which you have heretofore been a simple tenant!"

The farmer looked bewildered, but gradually the truth, in all its force, burst upon his mind, and the tears rushed down his cheeks, as he said, brokenly,—

"Oh, my lady, may Heaven reward you for all your goodness to me and mine! I have

now no anxieties for the future. What will Mary say?"

The thought of his good wife's pleasure at the generous gift caused him to laugh and cry at once.

Re-joining in her late tenant's delight she then said,—

"I will not detain you longer, John, for I know you are anxious to share your joy with Mary. You need not come for Arthur tomorrow evening, as I wish to keep him with me until after the departure of the Marquis, provided that his health remains uninjured in his forced seclusion. I will send you a note when I want you to come for him."

"Very well, my lady."

"As you go home, John, take the eastern road and stop at Mr. Layne's place. I have a note which I want you to put into the letter-box at his gate, so that he will receive it early in the morning."

Addressing the note she had recently written, Miss Wycherly gave it into the farmer's hands.

"Is there nothing else I can do for you, my lady?" he asked, arising. "You would make me very happy by giving me some hard hard service to perform—"

"Thank you, John. I appreciate your devotion, and, if I have need of your aid, I will call upon you!"

She extended her hand, which the honest farmer shook heartily and respectfully, and then dismissed him, Alison conducting him down the private staircase and giving him egress upon the lawn.

After looking the door behind him, the nurse returned to her mistress.

As she entered the inner chamber, Miss Wycherly was bending over the sleeping boy, her proud face transfigured by an expression of tender sweetness.

"Come and look at my son, Alison," said the mistress, making place for her servitress. "Tell me, did you ever see a nobler boy? Look at his broad white brow. Notice his sensitive mouth, full of expression even if asleep! Did you ever see a more intellectual face for a lad of his age?"

"Never—never, my lady!" responded the nurse, truthfully, her face reflecting the mother's fondness. "And he is as good as he is beautiful! He is so truthful, so spirited—"

"Yes, he is spirited! He will need a father's loving guidance through the years to come," and a shadow passed over Miss Wycherly's face. "Oh, Alison, do you think my boy will ever blame me, when he shall have grown to manhood?"

"Never, my lady—never!"

"I pray daily that I may live to tell him my story myself. No one can tell it as I can. Even Richard could not excuse or justify my conduct as I would!"

"Oh, my lady," cried the nurse, in sudden alarm, "you do not think you will die? You are so young, so beautiful! Better that I who nursed you in your infancy and whose years are so many more should die in your stead. You do not think that you have any disease—"

"Nothing but this sorrow ever eating at my heart!" cried Miss Wycherly, passionately. "Oh, Alison, I could pray to die but for my boy. I have been calm till this week, but the sight of the Marquis has opened my old wounds afresh! I am very weary!"

She knelt beside the couch, giving way to passionate sobs which seemed to frighten her nurse.

"Oh, my darling, my nursing!" cried Alison, weeping at her mistress's grief. "Don't cry—don't! It won't do any good. Think of Master Arthur, and Mr. Richard, and me. For our sakes, don't give way so. You will be ill!"

But the storm of grief, so long repressed, could not be stayed in an instant, and it was doubtful if Miss Alethea heard the pleading of her servitress.

Not knowing what to do in her alarm, Ali-

son did the best thing that could be done. She took one relaxed hand of the sleeping boy and laid it upon the bowed head of his young mother.

The touch quieted Miss Wycherly, and she hushed her sobs, fearing that he might be disturbed.

When she had grown calmer, she arose from her knees, crossed the floor several times, and said,—

"Could it be possible, Alison, that the Marquis keeps a watch upon my rooms? He was very impatient to-day, and I fear—"

Without completing the sentence she went into the ante-chamber and listened at the door.

A faint sound without came to her keen hearing.

"As I suspected!" she murmured. "He is capable of anything! But he could have heard nothing—these walls are so immensely thick! A drum could hardly be heard in that corridor from my inner room. I will confront him!"

Softly unhooking her door, she threw it wide open, and advanced into the corridor.

Instead of confronting the Marquis of Waldemere, as she had expected, she beheld the same being whom Basil Montmaur had followed to Lord Templecombe's rooms, in the opposite extremity of the Castle.

The girl seemed bewildered, appearing to have lost her way among the many galleries.

On hearing Miss Alethea's door open, she started as if to flee, and then drew nearer, clasping her hands in mute entreaty, as if feeling flight to be impossible.

"Leopold!" exclaimed Miss Wycherly, in a tone of surprise and reproach. "What are you doing here at this hour? Retire immediately to your chamber!"

The girl turned again, but hesitatingly, as if not knowing where to go.

The next moment she ran towards Miss Wycherly, still clasping her hands, and cried,—

"Pity me, lady, and help me—"

It was not the voice of Lady Leopold, and as the light of the lamp fell upon her Miss Wycherly noticed that while the features were precisely similar, there was something in the expression or air of this girl that distinguished her from the lady of the Castle.

Astonishment at the apparition kept the lady momentarily dumb.

"Lady, won't you have mercy upon me?" pleaded the girl. "You think me a thief, perhaps, because I have entered the Castle secretly, and at night? I can explain matters if you will hear me. Or, if not, let me go quietly away—"

"Who are you?" inquired Miss Wycherly, coldly.

"My name is Natalie Afton—"

It was indeed poor Natalie, as the reader has suspected.

"Why are you here?"

Natalie looked around her, as if fearing to be overheard, and answered,—

"It is a long story, lady. If you would let me enter your room, I will tell it to you."

After a searching glance at the girl's face Miss Wycherly directed Alison, who stood behind her, to retire into the inner chamber, and guard the slumbers of the boy—speaking in a tone too low to be heard by Natalie—and when the woman had obeyed, Miss Alethea said,—

"You can enter!"

Natalie obeyed, following the lady into the ante-chamber and closing the door behind her.

"Sit down!" said Miss Wycherly, seating herself in a *fauteuil* from which she could watch every change in Natalie's expression.

Natalie sank down upon a cushion in a low attitude, as if hoping to disarm the anger of the haughty lady who was now acting as her judge.

The poor girl knew how unwarrantable was her midnight entrance in the Castle, and her imagination conjured up an arrest, transfer

to a gaol, and summary punishment on a charge of robbery, or something similar.

Miss Wycherly's manner was not likely to dissipate her apprehensions, for nothing could have been colder or sterner, as she said,—

"You may proceed with your explanations. You shall have the fullest opportunity to justify yourself; but if you fail, I shall call up my steward and give you into his charge!"

Natalie sobbed with fright.

"I am not what you think, lady," she said, as soon as she could speak. "I am—that is, my grandmother is very respectable, and owns Afton Grange, a hundred miles from here—"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I can tell that best by relating my history," answered Natalie. "Last summer a gentleman came to the neighbourhood of the Grange, where I lived with my grandmother and uncle, and he prolonged his stay there on my account, having met me on the very day of his arrival. He called himself Elmer Keyes. He told me he loved me, and I believed he did," and here Natalie's voice quivered. "But he does not now!"

Miss Wycherly looked softened and murmured,—

"Then love is at the bottom of this strange affair? Was it love that brought you here to-night?"

"It was, lady. You look incredulous, but I can soon make it clear to you. Elmer stayed all the summer at a little cottage near the Grange, and we were married one morning at Falconbridge, a village a few miles distant from the Grange. We kept our marriage secret, because Elmer pretended to have family reasons for doing so. In the autumn he went back to town, but at first he frequently visited the cottage to meet me. I expected him last week, but, instead of seeing him, received this letter."

She produced from her pocket a torn and crumpled paper, which she brought to Miss Wycherly.

That lady read it through in silence.

It was some time before she spoke, and her voice was very gentle when she said.

"Poor child! You have been bitterly deceived! The very hand writing of this letter is disguised—yet," she added, "there seems to me a familiar look about it!"

"On receiving that letter I left home," resumed Natalie, forbearing to mention Hugh Fauld. "I went straight to Falconbridge, before visiting London, and searched the register for the record of my marriage!"

"Of course you found it?"

"Alas, no! The leaf on which it had been written was missing! The clergyman who married us was dead! The certificate that would have proved me good and virtuous was in the keeping of my husband! In that great strait I resolved to seek Elmer, and set out for London."

"Poor, innocent child!" said Miss Wycherly, beckoning the girl nearer. "How could you expect to find him under a false name in London? Your idea was mad!"

"God protected me! I had found on the cottage floor a torn card, on which was a half-legible address, and preserved it, I know not why. While seated in the coach I drew that scrap of paper from my pocket, and resolved to inquire for my husband at that address. I did so, but the porter was surly, and told me that a great many gentlemen had chambers there, and there was no Mr. Keyes among them. I hung about the place for a day or two, hoping to see Elmer, but I failed in that. Instead, I saw his valet, whom I had often seen at the cottage. The man was leaving the place, and did not notice me. If he had he would not have known me, as I wore a thick veil. I followed him, not knowing what else to do, and he led me to a railway station. I bought a ticket to a distant place, got into the compartment next him, and got out at the station, where he did. And then I tracked him to the Castle!"

"Tracked him here?"

"Yes, lady. I did not dare to inquire for him, not knowing his real name, so I hung about the ground, waiting for a chance to meet him—if he were here. Last night I found the opportunity. He—Elmer—came out to that glade where the fountain is, and commenced to smoke a cigar. I approached him and kissed him, before he knew of my presence. He sprang up, pale and terrified, and upbraided me for following him here. And then he hurried me into the shadow of the park, fearing that I might be seen. But he did not speak kindly to me. He swore that it would be the worse for me if I did not go home directly, and said that he was poor, and did not dare own his marriage yet. Wish that he left me!"

"This husband of yours is my guest, then? Have you learned his name?"

"Yes, lady—Basil Montmaur! I stayed in a grotto at the edge of the park all night, but started for the village this morning to obtain food. I was in one of the plantations when I came upon a woodman, and inquired my way: as he was about to answer me a group of riders came along, and I saw Elmer at their head. The woodman told me his name?"

"Basil Montmaur—impossible!"

"It would seem so, lady," and Natalie smiled faintly. "Once I thought him the embodiment of nobleness! This evening I sought to effect an entrance into the Castle, and in doing so saw him at his window. That gave me the knowledge I wanted in regard to his room. I found a window unsecurely fastened and crept in—"

"I will speak to the steward to-morrow about his carelessness!" interrupted Miss Wycherly.

The girl looked more anxious, and continued,—

"With some difficulty I found my way to Elmer's room. He was asleep. I had no desire to awaken him, wishing to search his effects for the certificate of our marriage. That was all I sought here, lady, but I failed to find it. Becoming frightened, at last, by his restlessness, I left his room, and was trying to find my way out when you met me!"

"Basil Montmaur!" exclaimed Miss Wycherly, meditatively. "You must be mistaken. Basil is the soul of honour. The woodman may have mistaken the person. Your Elmer may have been Sir Wilson Werner. What room has your husband?"

"A chamber in the other tower!"

Miss Wycherly started, and regarded the girl sternly.

"Do you know whom you accuse?" she inquired. "The person you claim as the man who deceived you is the Earl of Templecombe!"

"An Earl!" gasped Natalie. "Oh—no!"

"Yes, you claim Lord Templecombe as your husband! Of all the gentlemen, he alone has a tower-chamber. He sleeps in the western tower, on the floor above this!"

Natalie was appalled at this statement—hardly daring to believe in the rank of her traitor husband, and fearing that justice would never be done her.

"If Elmer is an Earl," she said, despairingly, "there is no need or use in my struggling longer. He would never own me as his wife, with my birth and education. He meant all the time to deceive me, and eventually cast me off! Oh, I wish I were dead!"

"Hush!" said Miss Wycherly. "You must not talk like that. Bear up bravely under your trials. You have not seen the end!"

"No, lady. But it is easy to foretell my life of misery and desolation—"

"Do not despair, Natalie. I believe your words, though it is difficult to do so, since Lord Templecombe is my near relative, and a suitor for the hand of my niece—"

"Your niece? Is she the lady whom I so much resemble? I saw her among the riders this morning!"

(To be continued.)

A GIRL'S HEART.

CHAPTER XIX.

He sat there for more than an hour. He was thinking over the curious and almost misadventurous fate which, while endowing him with so much, robbed him of that which makes every man's life taste sweet, and become precious to him.

He went over many things as he sat there. His heart was opened to himself, and he looked back over his past—the past he had tried so hard to, and had at last succeeded, in forgetting.

He realized again the full burden of shame that had come to his proud spirit when his wife's frailty had been made known to him. Standing as he did now, in the shadow of a great and sudden sorrow, he was tuned in sympathy with himself, as he had been those three years ago, and yet he knew that, bitterly as he had suffered then, he suffered far more bitterly now.

The best and purest chords in his heart had been awakened by his love for Alwynne; that dead passion could never stand aside by itself with such a love as she had inspired. He felt, with the destruction of his hopes and the breaking of his dream, as though the warmth of an August sun had been suddenly withdrawn from him, and he was left to shiver in some chill, dark underground from which there was no escape.

He had allowed himself to hope so securely. Some indefinable influence within him had seemed to spur on his hope. He had never analysed this influence, or questioned why it should have lived with him so strongly.

He had been so content to hope, he had grown only more and more used to the newborn feeling of happiness which was creeping so surely into his heart.

He felt now that he should have been warned by former experience not to have let hope build so strong a bulwark against the arguments of probability and disappointment. He sighed once now and again unconsciously as he sat there, like some chameleon, abandoned man rather than the owner and master of so magnificent an inheritance.

He lifted himself at last with an effort and rose to his feet, looking about him in a quiet way that had something inexpressibly sad in it.

"Gus will fry a bit," he said to himself. "Poor little soul, she is so happy to have me back here. She wants for nothing now to make her life one long song of contentment. Dear little Gus! If she were alone, if there were no one to love and protect her, my duty would have to struggle with my inclination; but as it is, Jack will be a brother as well as a husband; and if I stay away this time—not three, but thirty years—even Gus's affection must wane, and in time she may even forget me!"

His lip curled in his old cynical way as he thought this; then with a shrug of his shoulders, and another of those unconscious sighs that escaped him, seeming to be wrung from his overburdened heart, he turned to make his way to the house where Inneson and Miss Glencie were awaiting him.

He strode, in a dull sort of way, through the grass on to the pathway again. He looked neither to the right or left.

He was conscious chiefly of the warmth of the spring noontide sun, of the golden glory of light about him, that mellowed the whole world into a harmony of softest yellow and gentlest green.

The buzzing and hum of the bees sounded vaguely in his ears; but the busy myriads of the insect world breathed no whisper of gladness to him in the coming summer. They heralded one to another. With him there would never be another summer, for his heart was dead.

Suddenly he came to a standstill, and the heart that he called dead gave one awful and

painful throb. Strong man as he was, he shivered in that moment.

He had not seen her as she stood in the pathway, barring his progress. His eyes had been bent on the sun-kissed ground at his feet. It had been the love within him that had suddenly given him knowledge of her presence.

He passed through a moment of torture too great to be described; he felt that his weakness, his misery, must be written in every trait of his countenance, every line of his figure.

To her he betrayed none of the emotion he felt. His pale, stern face, his set mouth, his eyes so blue, so keen, so dark, spoke to her only of anger—anger and contempt.

She was no coward, as we have seen, but she faltered in this moment. She had prayed all night she might see him for one second—only one—that she might speak to him.

She must speak to him, she had said, passionately to herself, and so she had wandered into the grounds, wondering, fearing, knowing nothing, hoping nothing, save that she might speak to him just once.

There was something to be said to him which she must say. She knew, as though he had told her it in words, what his action would be.

The full strength, the full beauty of the love she had lost for ever had been revealed to her in the one moment when their eyes had met the night before—met, and held communion before they had turned aside and grown blind and dark with the mental anguish that had come to them.

Somehow she had not doubted him, despite her bitter experience of the world. Doubt for this one man had not come, but still she had not thought he would have cared so much.

He was so strong, so quiet, so self-reliant, so stern. It seemed almost an impossibility that she could have had the power to sway the heart of such a man.

She knew how great, how extraordinary this power was, and she trembled even in her courage. She must speak, but the words were harder to speak than she had dreamed.

They stood for a moment in silence. She was so ill, so drawn and pale, her beauty was dimmed. She seemed to have grown old all at once, and there was a curious look in her eyes that he could not understand.

A vivid flash of memory brought back to him the picture of the stormy day on the great Atlantic—of the wind-tossed, rain-drenched girl, with her laughing loveliness, and her graceful vitality. He remembered how sweetly her eyes had looked into his, and how her slender form had clung to him as he drew her out of the force of the wave that almost buried them beneath its rushing volume of water.

Why did such memory come to him at such a moment? He made an involuntary movement. Alwynne put out her hand, as though to sway his steps.

"Will you listen to me?" she said, her voice almost sunk to a whisper. Then quickly, passionately, "You—you will listen to me! You must! You must!"

He made no answer, looking at her only as though he could never look enough.

"You—you will forgive me for intruding upon you," Alwynne went on. "I saw you in the distance. I followed you. I—"

"You want me?" he said, and the sound of his voice was as music in her ears. "You want me? What can I do? Tell me what you want? You know you need fear nothing from me!"

His voice grew unsteady. He spoke quickly; he scarcely knew what it was he said. All he knew was that she who had lived with him—bewildering, tantalizing—inspiring him by her visionary presence, stood before him, at last—stood as he had pictured her so often under the branches of his veteran trees—the grounds of his land beneath her feet. The wealth of his possession stretched wide and

far about her; it was knowledge enough for him. The sight of her coming on his long, weary hours of thought robbed him of all other remembrance save that she was before him—that his hand could outstretch and touch her.

To Alwynne, the look in his eyes, the sound of sweetest expression in his words, brought a relief that was almost pain. He did not hate her then, he did not despise her, he did not even misjudge her. He loved her—he loved her!

She turned from him with a sudden gesture, and put her two hands over her eyes. Oh! what an awful, a horrible, a terrible mistake she had made!

Hugo looked at her quietly. His brain grew suddenly clearer; he saw her weakness, he realized she must be strong for them both.

"You want to speak to me, Alwynne?" he said, gently. "Say all you want to say. You know without words I will listen, and, if it is my help you need, that I will help you!"

She dropped her hands suddenly from her face, and turned to him again.

"I know—I know!" she said, swiftly.

"You need not tell me how good you will be to me. It is the thought of your goodness that hurts me most! When I remember," she paused for an instant, "it is so difficult to speak," she said, when she broke the silence again; "and yet—"

Hugo stretched out his hand to her.

"Come and sit here," he said, gently.

"You are worn out, poor child!" He led her back towards the old tree on which he had sat himself. "It is not very uncomfortable," he said, letting his voice sound as conventional and easy as he could; "and see, if you lean back here you will have almost a cosy chair. No, do not move. I will stand. I have been sitting here so long I am glad to stand."

He put one foot on the rugged, moss-covered wood, and leaned forward on his knee, looking down at her. She had a small black bonnet on her pretty brown hair. It gave her an older look, and yet her youth paradoxically proclaimed itself more potently to him now than it had done during the days of the voyage, when he had seen so much of her.

She was, after all, only a child—a child of nineteen years, and yet the finger of sorrow had traced a veil over her young beauty, and cast a shadow over the brilliancy of her life's spring time. His whole heart yearned over her as she sat there so pale, with such a look of misery in those grave, grey eyes, whose depths were revealing to him so much of what her lips would never say.

He felt he must help her. She tried in vain to speak.

"Why do you distress yourself about me!" he asked her, gently. "I know all that is in your mind, Alwynne. Do you think I should misunderstand you so easily?" he paused a moment while he saw her lips quiver. "Suppose," he said, letting the faintest of faint smiles flicker on his face for an instant, "suppose I speak for you—shall I?"

She just nodded her head, and her eyes rested on his strong, sun-tanned hand that lay on his knee. How she longed to take it in her two feeble ones, to cling to it, to press her lips to it, and weep out the bitterness of her heart upon its firm, true grasp! The sight of that hand brought back the scent of the sea and the hours when her love had fought with her proud spirit, and her indomitable sense of justice. Ah! if she could have foreseen! And yet—yet had she not done right in sending him from her? Had she not been true to herself and so him? For the first time she felt as though the purpose that had led her life into so strange, so unexpected a channel had been one great, one terrible mistake—that all the arguments she had conjured up to help her in combating her heart's weakness would fade and melt away when tried by the fire of this man's great love.

He loved her—not for her social state, not for aught beyond herself. She did not need his

words to tell her this. She knew it now when it was too late.

Hugo paused only for a moment, and then went on very quietly, very gently, —

"You wish to exonerate yourself in my eyes, but first, dear— you must do me some wrong. What wrong have you done me? Why are you letting some vague remembrance trouble you? You were truthful and straightforward to me. You sent me from you. You gave me no hope. If"—his voice was quite steady here—"if I let hope creep and grow in my heart was that a fault of yours? I have myself to blame. And even if it were otherwise, Alwynne, believe me, I could never bring myself to blame you."

He spoke the earnest truth. All the hardships, all the first anger, had died away completely. How could he be angry now as he stood looking down at her sorrowful young face, that bore a history in every line, and seemed to him to carry the traces of some great, some terrible mental struggle?

Before she went from him he must try and smooth some of those lines away. Perhaps she would speak out to him, tell him what this burden was. There was so much to tell. How came she here—a wife scarcely a fortnight, yet a wife whose kingdom was not glided with happiness? That was only too clear to him, only too sure!

Brought in direct contact with her sorrow his own faded away, and was lost in his desire to befriend her, to give her some comfort, some gleam of pleasure.

He was still bewildered by the stiffness with which the new turn of events had come upon him. The fact of her marriage, of her presence near him, the fact of this strange, sad meeting between them, all was full of bewilderment. But he controlled all desire to question.

After all, he had no right to question. If she chose to hold her silence he must submit without a word. But she would not be silent. He felt that her whole soul longed to pour forth its burden to him, to let him know that if a hurt were come to him that hurt was not desired by her.

She found her voice faintly as he ceased speaking.

"I—I wanted to see you to explain," she said. "You would think it so strange—so—so wrong—that I should have come here to your home—to your's," she clasped her hands together. "If I had only known, but I did not know. I was not told. I—I do not"—she said, averting her face—"I do not think. Perhaps I should not have comprehended it even if it had been told me. I—awoke last night to all."

Alas! poor child, the whole volume of her misery was conveyed to him in that whisper.

His heart gave one mighty throb, and the blood in his veins coursed madly, wildly, for an instant. He moved his foot and stood upright.

"I awoke last night to all!"

Last night, as she had stood in his home, as her eyes had held his, the veil had dropped from her senses, the dream had cleared from her brain. She had awakened to know—all! What all? Hugo did not dare let that question assume a definite shape in this moment—this moment of torture and of temptation.

CHAPTER XX.

He turned from her suddenly and walked away a few paces. His face was very pale as he came back to her.

"Something within me, I scarcely know how to define it, Alwynne," he said, as he stood before her again, "seems to pardon what might otherwise seem an intrusive curiosity. I think, little as you really know of me, you yet know enough to be certain that it is not curiosity that prompts me to question you now. Will you answer my questions?"

She lifted her eyes to him.

"I want you to know all," she said, simply. "It is your right."

He let a sort of impatience take hold of him.

"Do not let such an idea come to your mind," he said, hurriedly. "Right! I have no right even to speak to you without your permission. Once and for all dismiss such a thought!"

He was glad of the impatience to cloak his real feelings.

Her eyes filled with tears, but she bent her head so that he should not see them.

He went on swiftly.

"I know what you wish to explain. You do not want me to think you guilty of a lack of kind thought, of a sort of cruelty in coming to my home, being near me so—soon after your marriage. I assure you, on my honour, I had no such thought of you. I am convinced you would never be guilty of cruelty to me or to any other man."

"To you. Ah! no, no!" the words escaped her involuntarily.

Again that wild beating of his heart, that wild rushing in his veins. He checked his feelings with all his strength, and sat down beside her.

"Let me be your friend," he said. "Tell me all. Your heart is full. I can read its story in your face. Forgive me for saying it, but you seem to need a friend. Give me the happiness of feeling I can serve you a little, a very little?"

She put out her hand, and he held it in his for an instant, and then gently released it.

"Where is your mother?" he asked. "Why are you not with her?"

"We are parted for ever. She will not speak to me again."

Alwynne clasped her hands together.

"Oh!" she said, all the past-up agony in her heart rushing forth at last. "Oh! if you could know all, would you condemn me—would you? The struggle was so terrible, so horrible. She was my mother; she is my mother, and yet—and yet—"

Hugo paused a moment.

"Your mother disapproved of your marriage!" he said gently.

Alwynne conquered her emotion.

"I do not even know if she has yet heard of it. It will make no difference now. She has disowned me. She will never willingly see or hear of me again. See—see, this will tell you better than I can. You will read there how much of a mother I may claim in this world."

She thrust a crumpled letter into his hand and rose hurriedly, walking unsteadily a few paces away from him.

Hugo opened the letter. His brows were contracted almost to severity.

He knew Mrs. Brabante's large writing well. It recalled to him now how often he had longed for a glimpse of it in the days that had just gone.

There was no commencement, no term of endearment.

"You have chosen your own path. You have deliberately set your face against me. For all the care and luxury I have lavished upon you this is my reward, that my only child wantonly humiliates me, and shamefully takes herself out of my life. Be it so, Alwynne. We part; but understand me clearly—we do not part for a day, a month, a year—we part for ever. Henceforth you have no mother, I have no child. Doubtless, you will easily erase from your memory every recollection of one whom you have treated with such contempt. Send me no more letters. Do not attempt to approach me. I shall from to-day hold no farther communication with you; in fact, I have arranged to quit England for a lengthened period, and I shall therefore put it out of your power to molest me either now or at any future time."

The letter was signed "Louise Graham."

Hugo sat looking down at it. He could not—he dared not—let himself speak at first, for he feared to betray himself.

By-and-by, as she came back to him, he spoke, not looking at her, however, but keeping his face bent.

"What does this signature mean?" he asked. "Has she changed her name?"

Alwynne's voice was low in answering him. Her words conveyed the whole story in that answer.

"My mother is now Sir Henry Graham's wife!" she said.

Hugo gave a great start.

Henry Graham's wife! Louise Brabante! Mrs. Brabante, the handsome, aristocratic mondaine, the mother of the girl who had won his heart! He felt a cold shiver pass over him.

There was not a club in London that had not tossed the name of Henry Graham to and fro as a savoury scandal for many a year past.

The story of the clever man's extraordinary fascination had been something Hugo had learnt almost on his first introduction to the world.

It had been such an old scandal—such an old infatuation; but Hugo remembered now, as clearly as he had done in those youthful days of his, how hotly his sense of honour and justice had denounced the clever politician whose heartless neglect and humiliation of a sweet, gentle wife, all through the influence of an unscrupulous adventurer, had been the common gossip of the time. And this woman was Alwynne's mother! As with a flash of lightning he knew he understood everything.

He rose suddenly, and held out his hands to her.

"Why did you send me from you? Oh! my dear!—my dear! did you think my love so poor a thing—did you doubt its strength! Oh, Alwynne! why—why!"

Her hands rested in his. She was weeping silently. She could not speak. His words were only the echo of what she had been saying to herself all the miserable night through—the realisation of the horrible mistake she had made that beat in her brain since the first moment her eyes had rested on him.

He held her hands so closely his grip almost crushed her fingers.

"It was for me," he said, "for my sake—for the sake of my name, my position. Oh! love, my love!"

He ceased suddenly and loosened his hold.

"You loved me!" he said, and his voice was thick and hurried. "You loved me! You could send me from you because you loved me too well to risk a chance of harming me. You could do this, Alwynne—and yet—and yet, my Heaven, what have you done? This man—your husband!"

He could say no more.

Alwynne's courage broke through her tears. "I did not know what I was doing," she cried, wildly. "When—when I left my mother I had but two friends in the world. Marie, my faithful maid, and Basil Canning. Ah! do not look at me like that. You know I could not come to you. Marie could not help me. To quarrel with my mother means starvation for her; and—and then she had been with my mother so long, and it seemed wrong, cruel, to take her away. I went to Basil. He gave me shelter—he gave me love and pity. Heaven bless him for his goodness! He spoke of you! He begged to let him send to you! I—I made him swear he would deny me even if you mentioned his name! Yes—yes. You remember one day—you did speak. He suffered, poor Basil. He is so true—so true! He took me to the house where he lived, but I saw he had not money enough for us both. His cousin came to see him and me. The rest does not seem comprehensible to me now as I try to look back!"

The poor girl was standing with her two cold, trembling hands pressed to her eyes. She was shivering with the magnitude of conflicting, overwhelming emotion.

"I—I think I must have been in a dream."



[HUGO PUT ONE FOOT ON THE BUGGED, MOSS-COVERED WOOD, AND, LEANING FORWARD ON HIS KNEE, LOOKED DOWN AT ALWYNNE.]

When I am away from him I—I realise the madness—the—the horror!"

She stopped suddenly, as Hugo uttered a sharp exclamation.

"What have I said?" she asked in a dull sort of way. "I—I don't remember! I seem to be always dazed—always in a dream!"

Hugo took her two hands.

"My heart!" he said, tenderly, yet with a touch of command in his voice. "My love, you must be brave. You must control these moments."

He was distressed beyond measure at her words, at her demeanour. She seemed indeed to be as one who acted under some spell—some other influence. There was something to know—yet something in her strange, sudden, marriage to Blair Hunter, which she, poor child, could not at least, could not for the moment, explain, something which, maybe, she would never be able to explain.

Hugo was a true Englishman. He detected all mysteries, all vague, indefinite movements. He had a hearty contempt for all sorts of mental tricksters; and this feeling came hurriedly into his mind as he recalled Blair Hunter's curiously handsome, unsatisfactory face, and the distrust and dislike he had immediately conceived for the man on meeting him.

"He is good to you?" he said suddenly.

Alwynne answered "Yes" without hesitation.

"He is too good, he is too kind," she said. "I try so hard to like him for his goodness. I never liked him from the first. I think I almost hated him, and yet—"

She paused in the same vague way, with the same strange, drawn, painful look in her beautiful eyes.

Hugo bent and kissed her hands.

"I am your friend. You will let me be your friend?" he said, passionately.

It was little less than torture to see her as

she was. To him she seemed very ill, on the verge of a great mental and physical prostration. Her nervous system seemed entirely shattered; she had lost all the health and vigour that had been so apparent even beneath all her delicate beauty. Her voice and the way she spoke betrayed her more than anything.

He had learnt enough of her proud, reticent spirit, even in their short knowledge of one another, to feel that the girl had for some reason as it were lost grip of herself. She spoke to him as though she were speaking to herself.

He was assured that at any other time she would have died rather than have let him gather so much of her misery.

She had desired he should know some of the trouble, her mother's true status, for instance, but of her marriage.

Hugo hardly knew what to think of her. He only felt a hot passionate anger against the man she called her husband.

He pressed her to speak out more plainly, to tell him all.

She only repeated herself.—

"I don't know what I did. I do not remember," she said, and then she paused once. "He offered me a home. I was alone in the world, I could not earn my living; and then he was so kind. And even when I—I told him all he did not care—he was only more kind, more good."

"He loves her! How could it be otherwise? And who am I that I should misjudge him?" Hugo thought swiftly to himself, his strong sense of justice forcing him to think this even of his rival.

He led her back once again to the tree, and made her rest.

"It is a long walk back to the village. You cannot do it. Will you stay here while I go to the house and bring you a carriage?"

"I will rest," Alwynne said, and indeed she looked as though the faint soul that

stirred within her was about to flutter away for ever. She was like a shadow.

Hugo stood looking at her, his whole love in his eyes for a few moments. He could not bear to leave her, and yet to stay was more than he could endure.

As he was moving away, Alwynne started forward.

"Oh!" she said suddenly, agitatedly. "Oh! I remember that I have not said all. You—you must promise me something you will not refuse. I—I feel you mean to go away again, to leave your home—through me. You will not do this? Oh! say you will not do this; it is your home! We are only strangers at your gate. You must not go! It is we who must go. Give me your promise; it has haunted me all night!"

Hugo stretched out his hand to her.

"I give you my promise," he said, not quite steadily. "I will not go."

And without another word, another look, he turned and left her sitting there alone.

(To be continued.)

A MACHINE, said to be a marvel of lightness and ingenuity, has recently been built in Australia for experiments in flying through the air. It is propelled by an engine fed with compressed air.

TEA-TASTERS are a well-paid class of men, most of whom in the course of nature will die of disease superinduced by their unwholesome occupation. The habits of these men are exceedingly curious. Some of them refuse to ply their trade save in the morning, on the ground that the sense of taste cannot be trusted after it has been bewildered by hours of work. Most of them avoid the use of tobacco and of highly-seasoned food. Their accuracy of taste is astonishing. A tea taster will distinguish the price of a dozen qualities of tea, all from the same cargo.



["NOT A STEP FURTHER, MADAM!" SAID MRS. FROST. "THIS IS MY HOUSE, AND I WON'T HAVE IT OUTRAGED!"]

NOVELETTE.]

A FEARFUL LEGACY.

PROLOGUE.

THERE was not the slightest doubt about her guilt. From the moment the trial began it was easy to see how things would go. There was no sympathy for the prisoner, either amid the audience or among the jury.

The court was crammed. Not only the "people" were represented there, but the "classes" had mustered in full force, for this was a *cause célèbre*, which had convulsed Southshire almost to its very foundations. Before ever she was charged with wilful murder, Arline Denison had won for herself the bitter hatred of the county, because she, a penniless nobody, an utter stranger to the place had won the great prize for which all the unmarried girls and young widows of the neighbourhood were competing.

She had passed through Mapleton with a travelling company of players. Gilbert Denison and his house party had patronised the local theatre, and the young man fell desperately in love with the fair-haired syren who now stood in the dock charged with his murder. Mother, sisters, friends, lifted up their voice in solemn warning, but all in vain. Within a month the strolling actress was Lady Denison of the Moat, and Southshire society had to decide the momentous question—ought they to visit her?

The Denisons were the oldest family in the neighbourhood. The property was strictly entailed, and Sir Gilbert therefore possessed almost princely wealth, while his mother and sisters had but a moderate income.

The Moat was a delightful place to visit at, while the entertainments at the Dower House were few and frugal. Interest pointed to

paying court to the young bride, and so Southshire put its wounded feelings in its pocket, and went *en masse* to call on young Lady Denison.

Lady Alfreda, her mother-in-law, did not follow the public example; neither she nor one of her three daughters ever set foot in The Moat after Arline Denison there. Gilbert's only brother was in India with his regiment. He had married young, and for love, and was consequently almost as much in disgrace with his mother as her first-born son.

He and his wife wrote kindly letters to Sir Gilbert, and sent their love to Arline; but all those thousands of miles away they could be of little real use to her.

For a year all went well. Sir Gilbert looked the picture of happiness, Lady Denison was the fairest, most gracious chatelaine heart could desire. Then there came a cloud; the eagerly expected heir proved to be a daughter. Arline loved the baby the more for her disappointment; but the child received no welcome from her father. The Moat was entailed, and there was scant provision for daughters or younger sons. Sir Gilbert hated children. He would have been pleased with a son to carry on the old name; but he did not want a large family. Reminded by the doctor that the son might come in time, and, if not, a daughter could inherit, he did not seem consoled, and it soon leaked out in Southshire that little Miss Denison was not wanted by her father.

From that time troubles grew apace. Gilbert went to the Dower House during his wife's illness, and kept up the habit of going there even when she was well enough to desire his society.

Lady Alfreda was never weary of trying to sow dissension. At last there came a time when Sir Gilbert was so furiously jealous Arline hardly dared leave the grounds without asking his permission. The servants heard frequent quarrels. At last one night things

came to a crisis. Lady Denison left the dinner-table in hot anger, and the butler heard her say,—

"You shall regret this if there is a Heaven above us."

Two hours later the Baronet was found in the grounds shot through the heart, quite dead. His wife's maid proved that her Lady put on a dark cloak and went out directly she left the dining room. She never returned to her home. It was only the following afternoon that she was arrested at Mapleton, a small market town, five miles from The Moat.

From the first there was no hope for her. Even the lawyer engaged for her defence urged her to plead guilty of firing the pistol under extreme provocation, so that a verdict of manslaughter might be returned. He urged in vain. Arline Denison stuck to her statement that she had never seen her husband since she left him sitting over his wine.

The servants, all bred under the Denison rule, were not even just to the woman who had been to them a kindly mistress. Everything they could say against her they did say. The butler volunteered that "there was murder on her face when she left the dining-room."

Lady Alfreda declared her son was desperately unhappy in his marriage, and thought of suing for a separation. The neighbours tossed their heads; and Paul Melville, the solicitor for the defence, felt that never in his whole life had he met a more hopeless case. His brother, a barrister of high standing, was retained by him for the trial, and viewed things more cheerfully.

"I believe she is innocent," he said, slowly. "The only thing is to establish an *alibi*. Sir Gilbert was killed between eight and ten. His wife must prove what she was doing during those two hours."

Arline said sadly it was impossible. She had never spoken to a living creature until she reached Mapleton. She walked the whole

of the five miles; but she was weary, and not used to exertion. And so it was past eleven when she reached the little railway station, and the last train for London had gone. She went to the chief hotel for the night, meaning to go on the next evening to the metropolis. She shrank from travelling in the daytime, when she might meet those who had known her as Sir Gilbert's happy bride.

This was her story. She told Douglas Melville very simply that she knew it would condemn her—that she saw, to a prejudiced mind, she would have had time to fire the fatal shot, and yet reach Mapleton by eleven. She had not met a creature by the way. There was no one she could call to prove that when Sir Gilbert was killed she was far away from The Moat. She knew things would go hardly with her, and, for her own part, she would gladly die; life had been so full of pain, only there was her little child. What would become of Nell if she had to go through the world branded as the child of a murderer?

Douglas listened—and believed her. He was not a Southshire man, and so was free from local prejudices in favour of the Denisons. To his mind Arline was a beautiful, wronged woman, whom he would serve at any cost. He could easily imagine Sir Gilbert had been a domineering husband, and that the unhappiness of the marriage lay at his door.

Arline's own story was that her mother-in-law made the mischief. Lady Alfreda reminded her son continually of all his wife had gained by marrying him until Gilbert really believed she accepted him for his wealth and title. Asked to explain the words attributed to her by the butler, Arline said her husband had threatened to go abroad, placing his wife and child under his mother's surveillance—in other words, making them state prisoners. She hated Lady Alfreda, and feared her. It seemed to her an unmanly, cowardly, threat, and she had decided to go to London, and consult a lawyer.

She knew her baby would be safe in her absence, for the nurse was devoted to her little charge, and, unlike all the other servants, was not a spy in the employ of the Dowager.

And then the trial came—a lovely August day. All the rank and fashion of Southshire thronged the gloomy court-house, and the prisoner in all her youth and beauty—she was barely twenty-two—failing to win any sympathy from her sister women.

She looked round the vast gathering, and knew there was probably but one creature present who believed in her.

Douglas Melville, her counsel, had told her simply he was convinced of her innocence, though he feared the circumstantial evidence was so strong against her that no efforts of his could shake it. How beautiful she was, with the sunlight touching her bright hair, and making it gleam like threads of gold! Her blue eyes were almost piteous in their earnestness; but there was no shadow of fear on the lovely face. Arline Denison carried herself proudly, and looked as composed as though her life had not been at stake.

"Guilty!"

It had been the verdict expected by every one, and yet a thrill of excitement ran through the court as it was uttered. Another moment and the judge called on the prisoner to answer why he should not pronounce the fatal sentence.

No answer. Again he repeated his question, and a warder gently touched Lady Denison on the shoulder, as though to call her attention. Once, twice she opened her lips to speak, but no sound escaped them; then, with one smothered sob, she tottered and fell lifeless to the ground.

There was a terrible commotion in the crowded court, and a strange reaction set in. People even pitied the woman on whom they had had such scant mercy.

The doctor who had attended her during her brief married life, examined her, and said

she had died of heart-disease, from which she had suffered for months. A long time ago he had prescribed for it, and told her sudden excitement might prove fatal at any time. Asked why he had not warned her doctors, Dr. Green replied that prisoners had their own medical adviser, and for his part he was thankful poor Lady Denison was at rest.

"It would have been cruel kindness to prolong her life so that she might suffer the extreme penalty of the law!"

Of course the news was taken to Lady Alfreda and the Misses Denison. During the long weeks of Arline's imprisonment, these ladies had been perfectly helpless to interfere at The Moat.

Sir Gilbert's will, made before his cruel suspicions began, left his wife the whole of his unentailed property, and named her sole guardian of his children, if he had any.

Acting on this, Arline, by Mr. Melville's advice, had the establishment at The Moat broken up. The faithful nurse, with the little heiress, were installed in lodgings in Mapleton, near enough to the prison for mother and child to meet often.

It had been a scandal to all the Denisons, but they were powerless to interfere. Until Arline was proved guilty she had the sole right to order all that regarded her daughter.

And now, when the news reached the Dowager House that Gilbert's widow had been found guilty and was dead, a great triumph filled the hearts of the ladies there.

For full twenty years Lady Alfreda would be mistress of The Moat, with power to order all things in her grandchild's name. Surely, during that time, she could save a handsome fortune for each of her girls—surely with such advantages they would find husbands!

"Odious little wretch!" said Melinda, the eldest Miss Denison, speaking of her little niece. "I hope you'll put her out to nurse, mamma! It would be terrible to have her in the same house with us! Why, when she grows old enough, she will be killing the first of us who vexes her!"

But Lady Alfreda was not prepared to agree to this.

"The child must live with us at The Moat," she said, shortly. "You appear to forget, Melinda, that only her life stands between Jim and the property. If he and his wife come in for it, we shall be worse off than ever. They have six children already, and may have as many more! Depend upon it they will want every penny for themselves. Now, Gilbert, even during his infatuation for that woman, always allowed me five hundred a year!"

"So little Helen is to be kept alive, at all risks?" said Diana, the youngest aunt. "Poor child! I think she'd far better die for her own sake. It will be impossible to hide the family skeleton from her as she grows up. It really seems a pity our illustrious sister-in-law didn't die a few days sooner. If only she had not been found guilty it would sound so much better."

"I shall go to The Moat to-morrow," said Lady Alfreda, gravely; "and I dare say all can be prepared for our reception in a few days."

"And the baby," inquired Grace, calmly. "When is she to come to us?"

"I shall drive over to Mapleton after I have been to The Moat. If I take Gibbs in with me she can bring back the child. I mean her to be Miss Denison's nurse!"

"Are you going to call a baby of six months old Miss Denison?"

"I am. She is Miss Denison of The Moat, and though her mother was a murderess she will inherit the property just as though she had been the child of a properly-behaved gentlewoman. It is to be hoped she will take after her father."

"Gilbert used to declare she was his wife's image!" retorted Grace.

They made quite a formal affair of fetching the baby-heiress. Lady Alfreda ordered the carriage purchased for poor Arline when she

came home a bride, and supported by her eldest daughter and the family lawyer, and attended by the obsequious Gibbs she started for Mapleton at eleven.

None of them particularly liked their errand. Melinda hated the child she had never even seen.

Lady Alfreda had a guilty, remorseful consciousness that, but for her malicious interference, things might have gone more smoothly between Gilbert and his wife.

Mr. Soft, the lawyer, was a bachelor, and mortally afraid of babies; while Jane Gibbs, a very prim young woman, who had been in Lady Alfreda's service over ten years, had her own amount of pride, and thought herself far too respectable to take care of a child whose mother ought to have died on the gallows.

The excitement of the trial had died away. The body of the ill-fated Arline had been given up to Mr. Melville; for, as the sentence had never been pronounced on her, the authorities could not insist on her burial in the prison yard.

The barrister had already arranged for it to rest in the unconsecrated portion of the Mapleton Cemetery. At present it was sheltered in the very house where Lady Alfreda's carriage once stopped, a semi-detached dwelling of the "villa" type, whose owner had consented for a consideration to let her best rooms to the nurse and little Helen Denison.

Mrs. Frost opened the door herself. She had only come from London on her marriage, and so had no sort of feudal respect for the Denisons. A widow with snug savings, she did not need anyone's patronage, and so she spoke her mind to the footman with alarming frankness.

"You can tell your mistress, young man, I'm the owner of this house, and into it she does not come, as true as my name is Julia Frost!"

John Thomas would have been puzzled how to convey this message in polite speech to his lady; but, annoyed at the delay, the dowager had alighted, and was already at the gate, seeing which Mrs. Frost coolly pushed past the footman, and went to meet the intruder.

"Not a step further, madam. This is my house, and I won't have it outraged!"

"You forget yourself strangely, woman. I am Lady Alfreda Denison, and—"

"And you were so jealous of your son's wife that you turned his heart against her and wrecked both their lives!" continued Mrs. Frost. "Well, ma'am, this is my house, and I don't mean you to come into it. In my best bedroom lies all that's left of Sir Gilbert's wife, of the lovely girl he married not eighteen months ago. To my thinking you've killed her as surely as though you'd put a bullet through her heart, and so my lady you shall not come where she is!"

Lady Alfreda cowered beneath this plain speaking. John Thomas, feeling in a very awkward position, since he could no more get out of the little front garden than his lady could get in, settled the matter by climbing over the low iron railings, and so coming to his employer's assistance.

"Shall I go for the police, my lady?" he inquired, urbanely.

"You may fetch every policeman in England if you like, young man, but they can't help you to force your way into a private house where you have no business. That's the law!"

"But I have business here," said the lady, firmly. "I have come to fetch my grandchild. Her proper home is with me."

Mrs. Frost stared at her visitor in amazement.

"You can't fetch a thing twice over, my lady," she said, tartly. "You sent for Miss Denison last night, within three minutes of the trial being over!"

"I did not!"

Mrs. Frost shrugged her shoulders. "The nurse—she was a prudent body, she'd packed all her own things and the baby's—she said to me, 'If all's well

Lady Denison will go to London by the night train, and take us with her, and if things go badly Lady Alfreda will have the care of the baby, and send for her."

"Quite true! But I did not send last night!" said Lady Alfreda.

"Your pardon, ma'am," said Mrs. Frost, who got a little mixed in her language, as she became more excited, "but you did! Not ten minutes after the trial was over, when we knew it had all gone wrong, but hadn't a suspicion the poor young lady was dead, there drove up a carriage and pair, as grand as your own, and the footman knocked at the door, and said, 'Lady Alfreda Denison has sent for her grandchild.' The nurse she was ready in a moment, and sprang in with the baby. The man he took the luggage after her and they were off. The whole thing didn't take three minutes."

Mr. Soft came to his client's assistance; but though Mrs. Frost answered his questions to the best of her power, her replies added no more information to that she had already given.

To the lawyer's mind it was part of a deep-laid scheme. Arline Denison, dreading her child being brought up to detest her memory, had arranged with her friends to get forcible possession of the infant before Lady Alfreda could learn how events had gone. Probably the nurse was in the plot, but Mrs. Frost was not.

The only thing against this theory was that poor Arline Denison had been utterly "friendless" during the months she had spent at The Moot. No one had ever appeared to claim her acquaintance, so that there should be any friend of her's, willing for dear love's sake, to charge themselves with her child, seemed incredible.

Paul Melville was still at the Royal Hotel; his brother had returned to London. From the lawyer Lady Alfreda and Mr. Soft got little consolation. He said he knew nothing whatever of the baby and its nurse. He knew Lady Denison possessed ample means, and the nurse was a clever, shrewd-headed woman. It was possible they might have devised some scheme between them of keeping little Miss Denison from her grandmother's charge, but he could throw no light on the matter.

A detective was telegraphed for from London. Money was spent like water in the search for the missing child. A few facts were discovered, but nothing to explain the mystery.

A livery-stable keeper at Mapleton remembered a gentleman engaging a carriage and pair, and wishing his own servant to drive. He said he might require the brougham for some hours, and deposited a bank-note as security for its safe return, he being a total stranger to the owner. Sure enough, a coachman and footman appeared at the appointed time to claim the brougham. They took it away at four o'clock on the afternoon of the trial; it returned at midnight with only the coachman on the box.

He agreed to the charges made, and added a liberal *douceur* from his master; then he pocketed the change from the bank note, went to the Royal Hotel for the night, and travelled to London by the first train.

Mr. Soft's theory was that the footman and coachman were really two actors who had been in the company with which Arline Denison starred before her marriage. He went so far as to say the "gentleman" who engaged the brougham was one of the two who later on appeared in livery. Probably one accompanied the baby and the nurse to some hiding-place, while the latter returned with the brougham to Mapleton.

Only one thing was certain. Since the brougham was absent only eight hours, the first stage of little Miss Denison's journey couldn't be at most a four hours' drive from Mapleton.

Advertisements were inserted in all the chief newspapers. The detective followed up

every clue, likely or unlikely, but without avail; and six months after poor Arline Denison's unhappy death the lawyer notified to Sir James out in India that the search for the missing heiress having failed he was at liberty to take possession of The Moot and its revenues, subject, of course, to the condition of restoring her lawful inheritance to his niece if she returned to claim it.

CHAPTER I.

THE NOOK was an old-fashioned house at Fulham, where the velvet lawn sloped down to the river's brink. A picturesque old place, with low roof, and many rooms, all shapes and sizes, cropping up where you least expected them.

The auctioneer who sold The Nook to Douglas Melville, Esq., Q.C., was very glad to dispose of what he called an "impossible" property; for, in truth, to most people, the pretty homestead would indeed have been an "impossible" purchase.

To begin with, no poor person could have lived there in any comfort, for the size of the house demanded many servants, and it took three gardeners to look after the beautiful grounds, which were the chief charm of the Nook.

No fashionable person would have been content with a home so far from London, and most wealthy matrons would have required a larger drawing-room than the pretty apartment opening with glass doors on to the conservatory at one end, while the other faced the grounds. An ideal room to an artist, but one alas! which looked crowded with a dozen people in it.

But Mr. Melville was one of those lucky men who can afford to pay for what pleases them, and who also—almost rarer fate—can afford from their position to strike out a line for themselves.

He was a very distinguished man. He had won fame early in life. His marriage with an heiress had brought him wealth, and now if he never held another brief he had ample, not only for himself, but to liberally endow his only child Doris.

He had a romance in his life, this grave, self-possessed barrister, which few guessed. For years he had struggled against a hopeless attachment to an heiress; then, when his genius had won a position not displeasing to her father, she died in less than five years after their union.

Of four children Doris alone survived. People declared her life and her mother's hung on one thread, and that pretty Nancy Melville had declared the news of the baby's death would kill her. She never heard them. When her sister took her in almost a dying state to Madeira the infant was left behind in the care of a faithful nurse. A few months later Douglas Melville took his child, then grown into a fine healthy baby, to Madeira to rejoice her mother's sight, and Nancy seemed content that Heaven had spared her little daughter; only the change in the baby's health could not restore the mother.

Nancy lingered till the first breath of winter, and then Douglas had to lay her to rest in beautiful Madeira, and return to England a widower.

It was then that he purchased the "Nook." He wanted a home, he said, where Doris might enjoy country air, yet near enough to London for him to drive in every day.

He seriously offended Nancy's relations by refusing to allow her child to pay them long visits, and he contumaciously refused the suggestion of a maiden aunt that she should come and keep house for him, and "look after" Doris.

The faithful nurse and foster-mother had emigrated to Australia with her family, and the maid who had taken the little girl to Madeira remained as her attendant.

Betsy, as her charge called her, or Mrs.

Cope, as she was styled by the servants, was devoted to Miss Doris, and, though motherless, few children grew up in an atmosphere of greater tenderness than the barrister's little daughter.

And now she was twenty, a child no longer, but a girl of wondrous beauty, whose blue eyes already wrought havoc among the hearts of her father's younger friends. She was twenty turned, and she had never been to a party in her life; never slept a night away from The Nook, except when her father took her with him on his annual holiday every year.

She had no visitors, and paid no visits. Paul Melville and his wife remonstrated more than once with Douglas on the seclusion in which he brought up Doris. Surely she might have been allowed now and again to spend a few days in her uncle's house? Surely she had come to an age when she needed more refined companionship than Mrs. Cope's, good woman though the nurse might be?

Douglas took all exhortations in good part. He "had his reasons," was all the explanation he vouchsafed; and he might have gone on in his chosen course for ever but that Paul suddenly suggested to him how terribly lonely a lot he was preparing for Doris in the future.

"You are hard on sixty!" said the lawyer, frankly. "Granted, you may live till eighty—I'm sure I hope you will—yet Doris will then be only forty, and have a long life before her. By limiting her interests as you do, you are planning to leave her utterly friendless."

"She sees my friends. For two years past she has appeared when I have company!"

"Middle-aged fogies like ourselves, and all men. Besides, why don't you let her have a few young friends? She'll never marry like this!"

"I hope she never may!"

"Douglas, what a selfish wish!"

"When I think of her mother," said the Queen's Counsel, passionately, "I am ready to pray Heaven on my bended knees to save Doris from love or marriage!"

"That's all nonsense!" said the lawyer, practically. "Poor Nancy was a very sweet girl, but even when she was eighteen one could see the signs of disease. Even if your poverty and her father's ambitions had not given her years of anxious suspense, she would have died young. You had only to look at her to know she was consumptive. Now, Doris is the picture of health, and to wish to keep her single for fear of her inheriting her mother's complaint is preposterous!"

"Perhaps it is!"

"Listen," pleaded Paul, who was really fond of Doris. "My wife has taken a furnished house at Brighton for three months. Let Doris stay with her for at least part of the time. I shall be running backwards and forwards, and you'll always be welcome yourself. Come, Douglas, let it be a bargain. Do you know the Latouches are actually hinting the girl is deformed or something, because you keep her in such seclusion?"

Douglas laughed grimly.

"She is prettier and more graceful than any Latouches of them all. I can't think why that family are so officious! I never liked them, nor they me. While poor Nancy lived a truce was patched up between us. When she died, knowing I should never marry again, and that I had plenty for Doris, I restored my wife's portion to her family. Surely after that they might leave me in peace."

"My dear fellow," urged his brother. "Can't you see that in your way you are a celebrity, and that having only one daughter people are anxious about her. If you had a round half-dozen children like me it would be different."

"Well," and the long sigh proved the concession cost him something. "I know you and Lucy mean kindly, Paul, and so I'll bring Doris down to Brighton just as soon as you are ready for her."

Miss Melville received the tidings with more than indifference, positive displeasure.

"Without you, papa?" she asked, sadly, "Why, it will be perfectly horrid!"

"People say I am shutting up my pretty daughter, and forgetting she is a woman grown! I am afraid you must go to Brighton, Doris, and try to make the best of it."

"To be sure, sir," said Nurse Cope, when she heard the news. "It's time Miss Doris saw the world. I've often wished she went out to parties and that, like other young ladies."

"Do you think it is safe, nurse?" asked the barrister, doubtless alluding to the consumptive tendency Doris had inherited from her mother.

"Safe enough now, sir! A few years back it might have been different, but in the spring all danger will be over. And, you see, it's time you made up your mind."

"I shall tell her everything," Cope shook her head.

"I wouldn't, sir. Money's a nice thing, but ease of mind is better. You're plenty for Miss Doris. Better keep her happy, sir, than make her a great lady and break her heart."

"Of course you will go with her to Brighton?"

"No, sir. An old woman like me's no fit maid for a young lady visiting in a fashionable house; and Mrs. Paul Melville, sir, never took kindly to me. Let her engage someone she fancies."

One bright October day Douglas took his daughter down to her aunt's.

Lucy Melville had a fortune in her own right. She was a pleasant, good-tempered woman, and had been very much attached to her sister-in-law. For Nancy's sake she would show all possible kindness to Doris.

The Paul Melvilles had a handsome house near the Lawns. There were two girls already emancipated from school, and one son, who was in his father's office, and likely soon to be made a junior partner. Probably, when that happened, Mr. Lionel would be setting up a home of his own. At present, though hopelessly in love, he was not actually engaged.

"Of course, Lionel comes down every Saturday?" said Jessy Melville to her cousin, as the three girls sat, having a chat over the fire, in Doris's bedroom, before going to bed.

"But he is not in the least use to us. He almost lives at the Denisons; and if he isn't with them, he is watching for Esther to go past. It's ridiculous!"

"You are shocking, Doris," interposed Lucy, the elder sister. "Really, Doris, it is most prosaic love making! Papa and Sir James Denison are great friends, and Esther went to school with us. Lionel has been devoted to her ever since she wore short frocks and a pig tail. The only wonder is they haven't been engaged for ages; but, you see, Esther has no money, and I suppose Lionel thought he ought to wait till he was a partner."

"Is Miss Denison pretty?"

"She is not nearly so pretty as you, Doris!" cried Jessy, hugging her cousin. "But she is a dear little thing. All the Denisons are nice. It is a great pity they are so poor; and it is all their own fault."

"I thought baronets were always rich!" observed Doris. "Why is Sir James poor?"

"Because, though he is Sir James, he hasn't got the family property. There is a lovely estate in Southshire, and a clear ten thousand a year, which ought to be his; but, because it is just possible his niece is alive, he won't touch any of the money; though Helen Denison hasn't been heard of since she was a baby—more than twenty years ago."

"How very strange!"

"Isn't it? Sir James was only the younger son, and awfully poor. When his brother's child disappeared, the lawyers sent for him to come home and take possession of the property; but after he came and heard everything he declared he believed the little girl was alive, and said he wouldn't spend the money

with the risk of having to refund it. He knew exactly how much Sir Gilbert had paid his bailiff, and how much was spent on keeping up the property. He added these together, and decided to be the bailiff himself, and live in one wing of the old house. His mother was furious. Most people called it quixotic; but so he has gone on ever since. He spends twelve hundred a year, and invests the rest for his niece's benefit. If Helen Denison ever turns up she will be the richest woman in all Southshire."

"And is Esther his only child?"

"His only daughter. He has five sons. The eldest, John, is twenty-seven. He helps his father in the management of the estate, and writes books besides. John is awfully clever."

"And the others?"

"They are all doing well. One is a curate near us," here Jessy blushed suspiciously; "another is in his father's old regiment; the two youngest are in India in the Civil Service. It's wonderful how well they have all turned out, in spite of Sir James's poverty."

"And will he never take possession of the property? How long will he go on waiting for his niece to appear?"

"I don't know. The strangest part is that they all believe she is alive. Jack Denison declares he should have acted just like his father did; and once when I was at The Moat Esther asked if I did not think her cousin Helen would be very pleased with her home when she saw it. They aren't Brighton now for Lady Denison's health. You are sure to like her, Doris. She is so gentle."

The very next day witnessed the introduction, and Doris decided her cousin Lionel had made a very natural choice. Little Esther Denison was just like a humming-bird. She had such a sweet, sunny spirit, such a blithe cheerfulness, that the other girl's heart went out to her at once.

"I have never met your father, my dear," said Sir James; "but he once was a kind friend to a member of our family, and I am pleased to know his child."

"Papa, don't think of that old story," pleaded Essie, "it always makes you sad."

"No, my dear, only anxious. I always feel if only I had been in England twenty years ago I might have smoothed matters."

"Have you heard of our 'skeleton,' Miss Melville?" asked Esther, in a graver key, when she found herself alone with Doris. "I had better tell you the bare outline lest you should tread on dangerous ground in talking to papa. My Uncle Gilbert was murdered, and suspicion fell on his wife!"

Doris looked up with grave, sad eyes.

"Is it possible?"

"We were in India at the time, and grandmother and the newspapers made things look so black against poor Aunt Arline papa had to believe them. When she was tried, as she heard the verdict of the jury she fell down dead!"

"How terrible!"

"Wasn't it?" said Essie, gravely, "and her little girl, Helen, disappeared. She is the true mistress of The Moat, and for years a detective was employed to find her. At last papa gave it up. He believes now that Lady Denison was innocent, and her one desire was to save her child from being taught to condemn her. He says he is sure, when Helen is of age, and her own mistress, she will return. That is how we first came to know your uncle. He was the lawyer Lady Denison employed in her cause, and your father defended her at the trial. Papa wrote to him when he came home, but Mr. Douglas Melville replied that the Denison case was one of the few failures of his life. Till his death he should always believe in his client's innocence, but he despaired of proving it. And so, Miss Melville, now you will understand why there has always seemed a link between your family and ours."

"I understand," said Doris, and her first letter to her father was full of the praises of

Sir James Denison and his family. The successful Q. C. looked bewildered when he read the artless lines.

His first idea was to recall Doris at once on the plea that he had the strongest objection to the Denison family, but a little reflection showed him the impolicy of this step.

"I can't shut her up all her life," he thought, sadly; "but it does seem like fate that the first time she leaves me she should meet the very people from whom of all the world I would fain have guarded her. Poor little Doris! Your tranquil life is over for ever, I fear, and dark clouds loom over your future!"

CHAPTER II.

SIR JAMES DENISON sat in the little alcove he used as a study with a very troubled expression on his face. Never lived a kinder or more generous-hearted man than the present Baronet.

Gilbert and the three sisters had all taken after their mother; but Jim had the sweet temper and brave spirit once thought almost hereditary among the Denisons.

He had never been a rich man, but he had contrived to get a great deal of happiness out of his life. His gentle wife was devoted to him. His six children were all a joy and a credit to him. If poor for his position, he yet had enough to pay his way, and the marked enmity of his mother and sisters had never been able seriously to trouble him.

For Lady Alfreda and her daughters had been thorns in Jim's flesh from the day of his return to England. They had clamoured loudly for him to "take his rights." They had declared it was his duty to continue the allowance Gilbert had always made them; and when he expressed his intention of keeping his niece's property intact, and living in one wing of The Moat on the income formerly paid to the bailiff, their indignation knew no bounds. From that time forward they hated Sir James and his wife almost as in bygone days they had detested poor, beautiful Arline.

To no one in the world except his wife did Sir James confide another reason for his line of conduct. Before he had been a month in England he received a letter written on blue business paper in a clear, legal-looking hand. It had neither date, beginning, or signature, but it impressed the Baronet with a strange conviction that it was true.

"You are earnestly advised not to take possession of your brother's property, his child Helen being still alive."

That was all. For more than twenty years Sir James went on his quiet way untroubled by any further anonymous communications. There were times when he firmly believed his niece must be dead, and yet a strange, superstitious faith in that brief note made him obey its behest; and now after that long silence once again he had a communication from his unknown correspondent.

It was so strange. He was at Brighton for his wife's health, and because being within an hour's journey of Mapleton either he or his son could go backwards and forwards to attend to any business at The Moat.

But Sir James lived very simply. He did not mix much in general society, and his movements were not chronicled in the fashionable newspapers. How, then, had his correspondent discovered that he was at Brighton, and found out the very street and number of the house where he was staying?

His wife came in and found him still lost in thought, with that strange cloud upon his brow.

"Jim, what is the matter?" she asked, gently. "I am sure there is something wrong."

"Have you set your heart very much on Jack being master of the Moat, Molly?"

"No. I believe Jack will make a name for himself anywhere. But I own, dear, I should like the mystery cleared up, so that we might know whether or not The Moat was ours."

"Well, you are more unselfish than I am," said Sir James, with a sigh. "I must confess since Jack grew up the clever, noble fellow he is, I have had a strong desire that he might yet inherit my father's house. You see, Molly, ours is an old name. It seems hard to me to fancy Mapleton without a Denison at the Moat."

She let her hand rest on his shoulder tenderly for a moment, and then she drew a chair close to his, and sat down. These two were lovers still, although they had six grown-up children.

"What has set you thinking of The Moat this morning, Jim?"

"This," and he put into her hand a sheet of blue paper, precisely similar to that they had looked at just twenty years ago.

Lady Denison unfolded it with trembling fingers. Like Sir James, she had pitied poor Arline greatly in the past, but she did not approve of the mysterious abduction of little Helen.

"Miss Denison will be of age on the first of March. At present she knows nothing of her expectations; but, in justice to herself, and fairness to you, I think she ought to take her proper position as soon as she is twenty-one."

Lady Denison looked bewildered.

"Who is it that writes? Who is the 'I'?"

"I have no ideal. I should imagine the nurse conveyed the baby to some of its mother's friends, and one of them has been her guardian ever since. Every word of this letter is true, Molly. It is only just to the girl, and fair to us, that the truth should be made public; but yet I never knew till now how much I had hoped to see my boy the acknowledged heir of our old home."

"Jack has never counted on it."

"Never, and he will probably settle in London, and make a name for himself in literature. It is far better for him that he should know his exact position. He won't lose all his friends, though he turns out to be only 'a penniless lad with a long pedigree.'"

"No," and the mother's eyes brightened. "And Mr. Melville is not likely to prove a hard-hearted father!"

"Molly, what do you mean? How many more marriages are you planning between our children and the Melvilles? Of course, everyone can see that Essie and Lionel understand each other, and I have suspected the Rev. Charles of an attachment to Jessy; but I never dreamed of anything between Jack and Louey!"

"Neither did I!" replied his wife. "Oh, Jim, are you quite blind? Can't you see that our boy lost his heart at first sight to Doris? It is Douglas Melville, the Queen's Counsel and famous barrister Jack will have to appeal to, not our old friends here!"

Sir James looked thunderstruck.

"She is a pretty creature, and I do believe a good one; but her father is reported to be peculiar—and I had rather it had been Louey!"

"All celebrities are peculiar!" said Lady Denison. "I never heard anything worse of Mr. Melville than that he was heart-broken at his wife's death, and kept his child jealously to himself lest uncles and aunts should steal her love!"

"That's not all!" Sir James looked worried. "Paul Melville told me himself his brother had a fixed objection to Doris marrying, because her mother died in a decline."

"Well," said Lady Denison, slowly. "Consumption is not always hereditary, and I never saw a more healthy-looking girl. I am sorry you don't like it, Jim! I was so pleased!"

"My dear," he said, good humouredly, "when a son is as good as our Jack, he deserves to please himself without remonstrances. Doris Melville is a lady, and a very sweet girl, but I am afraid there will be difficulties. I shouldn't like my boy to be called a fortune-hunter; and Douglas Melville must have made a heap of money!"

"Shall you tell Jack about this?" and she touched the sheet of blue paper.

"No; it is not worth while. In little more than three months we shall be at the first of March, and then things will right themselves."

John Denison was a contrast to the rest of his family—a grave, thoughtful young man, with something serious even in his smile. Esther always complained Jack never cared about her friends; but after he had been introduced to Doris Melville, she had never cease to lament this want of taste again. It was love at first sight. The man of rare talent, who at twenty-seven was already climbing the ladder of fame, and the girl who had led a quiet, secluded life, seeing nearly as little of the world as a convent maid, seemed at first thought singularly unsuited; but Jack's heart was won by her lovely blue eyes and rich, musical voice, even before he found out that she had a keen imagination and intellect, so that she could creep into his thoughts better than his prissy sister had ever been able to do.

Doris had read a great deal in her lonely girlhood; books had become real friends to her. Jack soon discovered she was his ideal woman; and before he had joined the Brighton party more than three weeks Lucy Melville told her husband she was certain Doris would be Lady Denison.

"It will be a cruel blow to Douglas if she is," replied the lawyer. "That name has a painful ring in his ears even now."

"Didn't he defend the last Lady Denison when she was tried for murder?"

"Yes. He made one of the finest speeches ever heard in a criminal court, but he couldn't save her. After that he almost gave up practising in criminal cases. He had an obstinate belief in Lady Denison's innocence, and it weighed upon his mind that he had not been able to induce the jury to take his view. Then not long after poor Nancy died. It was a trying year altogether to poor Douglas. When he came back to England, and settled with Doris at The Nook, I saw the first silver threads in his hair."

"Had I better discourage Jack's visits?" asked Mrs. Melville, in alarm.

"It's no use interfering in love affairs, Lucy. Let things take their course. Mr. Jack generally gets his own way. He may win over my brother to consent, but I confess I doubt it."

"Of course Jack has no private means, but then he must be a baronet some day."

"And his wife be Lady Denison. That will be the hardest part of it to Douglas."

"Was she very beautiful?"

"Who?"

"The other Lady Denison—the whom Douglas defended?"

"She was so lovely that if I had not known my brother's heart to be centred on Nancy I might have thought his great interest in her arose from a warmer feeling than pity."

"Ah!"

"I think you know Mr. Jack will not meet with a very encouraging reception at The Nook; but, my dear, Lucy, don't look so miserable. It is not your fault. You could not prevent Doris from being beautiful, and Mr. Denison from discovering the fact. Let things be, my dear, and wait for the crisis."

And the crisis came that very night. They were all on the West Pier listening to the band, the young Denisons and Mr. and Mrs. Melville and their daughters and niece. Of course so many people could not keep together like a flock of sheep; and, as had happened before, it was Doris who sauntered away to the pier head with Jack Denison.

"I like Brighton very much," she said, in reply to some question of his. "I never was here before. My father does not like this neighbourhood."

"And yet Sussex is one of the prettiest counties in England!"

"Papa hates it—Sussex and all the neighbourhood, I mean. He prefers the north. He says one can breathe better there."

"But you live in London, don't you?"

"Yes; but far enough away from the London smoke. When the trees in our garden are out you could fancy yourself miles in the country. They shut out all view of the houses round completely, back and front; only beyond the lawn you can just see the river."

"And you like it?"

"I love it dearly. It is my home, you know. Papa bought it when I was a baby, and I can never remember living anywhere else."

"It must be very lonely; but I suppose your cousins often come and stay with you?"

"I hope they will now, but I had never even seen them when I came to Brighton. Papa never cared for visitors, and he would not let me go and stay with Aunt Lucy because he thought I should feel strange in such a large family."

"He must be very fond of you?"

"And I of him. Dad and I have been just everything to each other."

"But, Doris," pleaded her lover, "don't you think your heart has room for another lover? My darling, from the moment I saw you I knew you were the kindred soul I had longed for. Doris, I love you with all my heart and strength. I am not rich yet, but my prospects are fair, and I shall soon be able to offer you an easy home. Dear, can't you care for me? My whole life will be brightened if only you will promise to be my wife."

"Your wife!" repeated Doris, in alarming surprise. "I never thought of such a thing. I like you very much, Mr. Denison, but I never dreamed of this!"

"But now, can't you do more than like me, Doris? I would cherish you so tenderly, my little love, if only you will give yourself to me."

"I like you very much," said Doris, wistfully, "better than anyone else—except my father; but—"

"What are your objections?" he asked, tenderly. "Are you afraid the liking will never grow into love? I will risk that, Doris, gladly!"

"No," she blushed deeply under the friendly cover of the darkness. "I am not afraid of that."

"Of what then?"

"I never meant to marry anyone," said Doris, dreamily. "My father cannot spare me."

"My darling!" said Jack, artfully, "I am not asking you to marry me to-morrow, or even this year. Of course Mr. Melville will miss you terribly, but he would have time to get used to the idea; and, Doris, such partings come in the law of nature, and are not all pain. If he loves you, dear, he would rejoice in your happiness."

"He does love me, but—"

"Perhaps he is ambitious for you?" said Jack, rather disconsolately. "I am a shocking bad match, I know; but, dear, no one can love you better."

"Dad ambitious!" and Doris gave a silvery little laugh. "I am sure he is not. He always thinks people should marry for love, and nothing else; besides, Mr. Denison, you are not a bad match. You are going to be a famous man, and all your friends will be very proud of you!"

"Will you be proud of my success, Doris, if I win it?"

"Yes."

"And may I go to Mr. Melville and ask him for this little hand? Doris, don't torture me with suspense, my darling. If you can't love me, say so!"

"I think I love you now," she answered gently. "I know I should be proud to belong to you, and to have the right to glory in your triumphs; but, Mr. Denison—Jack, my father is getting old, and I am all he has."

"Fifty-fives not old, Doris!" objected Jack.

"Darling, you have made me so happy. You will let me go to Mr. Melville to-morrow, won't you, and plead my own cause?"

"But you won't be angry with dad," pleaded the girl as she consented, "if he does

not see things as you do? You know he is all alone, and I am all alone."

Jack gave the promise readily. It was agreed between them that, though he should tell his father and mother of his proposal, nothing should be said to Doris's uncle and aunt respecting the engagement until it had been ratified by her father's consent.

The lovers parted in good spirits. Jack was going up to London the following day, and would call on Mr. Melville at The Nook, where Doris said her father would be sure to be found any time after five.

CHAPTER III.

A MIDDLE-AGED woman, looking like a house-keeper, answered Jack's ring, and stated that Mr. Melville was at home, in the ordinary matter-of-fact manner that might have been expected of such a superior retainer; but when Mr. Denison handed her his card she trembled as one who had the ague, and seemed so utterly terrified that the young man was not a little mystified as he followed her to the library—a long, narrow room, furnished in carved oak almost black with age.

He was not kept waiting long—three minutes at the most—and Douglas Melville entered, stern, grave, and self-possessed.

Jack had never seen the celebrated Q.C., whose name was familiar in all legal circles. His first thought was that he was a great contrast to his brother Paul; his next that Doris must take entirely after her mother's family, since not in a single point did she resemble his host.

"You wished to see me?" said Douglas Melville, courteously offering his visitor a chair. "I usually transact business at my chambers; but as a friend of my brother's, I am quite willing to discuss any case with you here."

Jack was a little taken aback; but one look at the grave, earnest face, reassured him. Douglas Melville might regret his suit; but he would at least give him a patient hearing, and state his objections fairly, for truth was written in his eyes.

"The business I have come upon seemed more connected with your home, sir," began Jack, simply. "Miss Melville told me I should most likely find you here after five o'clock."

"We will leave my daughter's name out of our conversation, if you please, Mr. Denison!"

"But we can't," explained the young man, hurriedly. "It is because of her I am here. Mr. Melville, I love your child dearly, and she has allowed me to come here, and ask your consent to our engagement."

Douglas Melville looked at Jack fearfully, as though he would read him through and through; then he said, gravely,—

"It is not five weeks since Doris left home. You were then an utter stranger to her. I can't believe, I won't believe, in an attachment of such sudden growth. It is only a childish fancy!"

"I am twenty-seven," said Jack, gravely, "and I never thought of love until I saw Doris. I lost my heart the first time I spoke to her. I am quite aware that at present I am a poor match for your daughter; but I am young and strong. I have made a little way already, and I will never rest until I have won a home and position fit for her acceptance."

The barrister's face softened strangely.

"I am very sorry," he said, kindly. "Your means have nothing to do with the matter. I am not a mercenary father. I can give Doris an ample fortune. I have the greatest respect for Sir James Denison. I like what I have heard of you; but I cannot let you marry my daughter. It would entail misery on you both!"

Jack sprang to his feet in indignation.

"I do not understand you. I can offer her an affectionate reception from my parents,

who love her already. I would not even ask you to give her to me until my income had increased to a sum you deemed sufficient. Why should my marriage with Doris bring misery on us both?"

Mr. Melville paced the room twice with eager, restless strides before he returned to his seat, and answered Jack's question as though it had just been spoken.

"I will explain everything to you on one condition that you keep the secret I am about to impart to you from the whole world, including your parents and Doris herself."

"And if I refuse this condition?"

"Then, sir, our interview ends at once. I shall go down by the next train to Brighton and tell Doris everything. If she knows my story it will embitter her whole life, and separate her from you far more powerfully than my prohibition can."

"Mr. Melville, I cannot risk her happiness. Tell me what you will, and I swear that it shall never pass my lips without your consent."

Douglas Melville put out his hand, and Jack clasped it heartily. The strangest thing about the interview to the young man was that though Mr. Melville was crushing his dearest hopes, he yet felt drawn towards him by an irresistible force of attraction.

"Doris is not my child!"

Jack looked up quickly. He understood a great deal now that had puzzled the world, and bewildered even the barrister's own brother.

Douglas had given back his wife's portion to her own family because the child of his love had no claim on the Latouche property. In like manner he had brought her up in seclusion, keeping her aloof from his wife's family, lest his secret was revealed, and these reproached him with imposing a stranger on them as their niece.

"I think I understand," said Jack, simply, to Douglas Melville. "You mean there is a shadow on her own name, and so you have given her yours. You do not know me, and so you think I am mean enough to love her less because she is the daughter of some poor stranger instead of a famous barrister. Mr. Melville, you wrong me. If you proved to me that Doris was born in the workhouse I should still ask you to give her to me as my wife!"

"I believe you would," said the Queen's Counsel, warmly; "but, my boy, it is worse than that. Beautiful and sweet-tempered as she is, my Doris inherits from her mother a fearful legacy. If her true parentage were revealed, I tell you, your family, ay, and perhaps you yourself, would shrink from her in loathing!"

Jack had grown white to his very lips with strong emotion.

"Don't tell me her mother died insane!" he whispered, hoarsely. "I can bear anything but that."

"Her mother had the clearest intellect, the broadest mind of any woman I ever met. She was beautiful too, more so even than Doris; but she died at twenty-two, in the eyes of the world a murderess!"

Jack turned to him quickly.

"Do you mean that she was Arline Denison?"

"I do! I have had thirty years' experience of law and prisoners. I declare to you, Mr. Denison, that I am as convinced of that poor creature's innocence as though I had seen another person commit the murder; but judge and jury condemned her, and save for Heaven's mercy in taking her life before the death sentence was even pronounced, she would have perished on a scaffold."

There came a deep silence. It lasted, perhaps, five minutes, and then Jack said, cheerfully,—

"You have kept the secret for twenty years, Mr. Melville! Won't it be possible to keep it always. I will marry Doris gladly, joyfully, but I could not bear to marry her as my uncle's heiress. Don't you see people might try to poison her mind against me by saying

I did it for her money. Let me have my wife, Mr. Melville, and The Moat and its broad acres can remain in my father's charge. He has guarded them for Helen's 'these twenty years. Let him keep his trust."

Douglas shook his head.

"The risk is too great to run," he said, slowly. "I have kept the child in retirement. As your wife she must mingle in the world, and face the public gaze of Mapleton. Do you think, even after twenty years, there are not people left there who remember the 'beautiful murderess, Arline Denison?'"

"But Doris is not like her mother—I mean Mr. Paul Melville knew my aunt, and he never remarked any resemblance!"

"Because Paul has seen the child grow up from babyhood. If he had met her for the first time as a woman grown, he would have seen the likeness. Besides, Mr. Denison, your grandmother is still alive. Do you think Lady Alfreda has forgotten the features of the poor girl she hated with such a bitter, malignant, jealousy that she rejoiced at her death? Were it anyone but a Denison who offered to risk all discovery so loyally for love of my child, I think I should take you at your word; but how can I send her into a county where her mother's story is in everyone's mouth, and where some of that mother's bitter foes still reside?"

"But what is to be done?"

Douglas Melville shook his head.

"I confess I have no idea. When I passed my word to Arline Denison to save her baby from Lady Alfreda I never guessed the complications that might arise; but even if I had I fancy I should have acted just the same. The mere thought of her little Nell being brought up to execrate her memory was torture to her."

"Then it was you who managed the 'abduction'?" I have often wondered about it!"

"It was simple enough. Sir Gilbert left his wife all his personal property. She drew out as much money as she could get at—several thousand pounds—and invested it in the funds in the name of her child's nurse. This was done before I ever saw her. When she confided her trouble to me she said Helen would never want for money; but the nurse, though faithful and devoted, would be no match for Lady Alfreda in cunning; and, moreover, all search for the baby would be directed against a lonely woman and an infant girl!"

"My wife was in an almost dying state at Madeira. It had been predicted by the physicians that she would never survive the loss of her infant who had been left behind at nurse in England. Arline Denison's child was of the same age. The day I heard her anxieties about little Nell I heard also of my own child's death. It seemed to me if Lady Denison's daughter could be substituted for our dead baby my wife would be spared a last grief, and the little Nell would be assured of a home."

"Fortune favoured me. The woman who had nursed little Doris knew of my wife's state. She was on the eve of emigrating, and would keep my secret. For a consideration her husband would assist in the plot for carrying off little Nell and hold his tongue. He was an ignorant fellow, could neither read nor write, and, besides, was just leaving England for ever."

"In those days I sometimes took part in amateur theatricals, and knew how to 'make up' my face and disguise myself as a coachman. The only difficulty was the time I was bound to stay in court till the verdict was given."

"Mrs. Frost, the landlady, made a little mistake when she declared the carriage and pair rolled up directly the case was over, there was a delay of quite half-an-hour, for I had to put on my disguise, and then join Williams at the livery-stable. We drove to Newhaven, and went on board the Dieppe steamer. I need not say we never crossed to France. Leaving the vessel before it sailed we got on to London that same night, and caught the

steamer for Madeira the following day. My wife died very soon after, and I came home and settled here. The woman who let you in, Mrs. Cope, is the nurse chosen by Lady Denison for her child. She and I have shared the secret for twenty years!"

"And the man who drove you to Newhaven—has he kept silent?"

"He and his wife were drowned on their outward voyage. Humanly speaking, Mr. Denison, it always seemed to me no one could discover my deception unless Doris's resemblance to her mother was ever noticed. Then I fear the whole truth would come out, at the very seclusion in which I have brought her up would confirm the suspicion she is not my child!"

"Doris must never know the truth," said Jack Denison, gravely; "it would break her heart!"

"And equally she must never marry you," observed the barrister. "Don't you see if the poor child is to escape her fearful legacy of shame she must live far away from Southshire and all who know her mother."

Jack looked perplexed.

"You say you believe my aunt to have been innocent? My father takes the same view; but yet, Mr. Melville, neither of you suggests who else could have committed the crime. The medical evidence negatived the idea of suicide, so that Sir Gilbert must have been murdered. Have you never formed a theory as to the assassin?"

"Dozens of times. I used to brood on the subject till it made me almost morbid, but I never hit on a theory that seemed probable, though I started all kinds."

"I wish you would tell me a few of them."

"Well, I'll try. It wasn't a common burglar intent on plunder, for nothing was taken, and the pistol found near was of most expensive workmanship. Then, as Sir Gilbert always went in to the grounds after dinner, and usually smoked a cigar in the little arbour close to where the murder took place, I conclude the tragedy was the work of some one who knew the grounds, and was thoroughly acquainted with his habits."

"But my uncle had no friends in the neighbourhood!"

"And a man's friends don't usually murder him! No, Mr. Denison, to my mind it was one of two things. Sir Gilbert was done to death by some forsaken love. He had had one or two passing attachments before he threw the handkerchief to poor Arline—or else—"

"Go on, please."

"Well, you know, with her beauty she must have had friends before she was Lady Denison. Don't you think it possible that one of these, hearing how her husband treated her—Sir Gilbert was a false and cruel husband, though the jury denied it by their verdict—was fired with indignation, and resolved to revenge her wrongs?"

"But no friend of hers would have left her to suffer in his stead!" objected Jack.

"You forget men hold life very dearly. He may have meant to come forward at the eleventh hour and take the guilt on himself in time to save her life, but is required stronger courage to give himself up just to clear her memory from reproach."

Jack got up with flashing eyes.

"It shall be my life's work to hunt out my uncle's murderer! Then when I have cleared her mother's name, Mr. Melville, will you give me Doris to be my wife?"

"My lad, you are setting yourself an impossible task. The story is twenty years old!"

"But such stories are not forgotten easily. Depend upon it, Mr. Melville, if I put all my efforts, all my energy, into the search, I shall discover the criminal who killed my uncle to be either the man who avenged his treatment of my aunt, or the woman who had hoped to do his wife. Something tells me it was one of these. Love, distorted and disfigured person, but still love, and not avarice, was at the bottom of *The Moat Tragedy*."

"You will remember your promise of secrecy?"

"I will."

"Shall you go back to Doris?"

"I shall write and tell her you have promised your consent to our marriage on one condition, and that, until I have fulfilled that, I must not see her again."

The barrister shook his head sadly.

"You will be old and grey-headed without unravelling that secret, my boy. The *Moat Tragedy* is past humankind's skill to unfathom."

"It is the only way," said Jack, resolutely.

"I want Doris, and you have proved to me she cannot be my wife, until I have cleared the shadow on her mother's name, and saved my darling from a fearful legacy!"

"Heaven's peace upon you, my boy," said Douglas Melville, solemnly; and then they parted, a strong mutual liking already established between them for a girl's dear sake.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Doris—to give her still the name she thought her own—received Jack's letter, her first feeling was an intense thankfulness that nothing about her engagement had been confided to her aunt and cousins.

Mrs. Melville and the girls might have their own private suspicions as to Jack Denison's sudden departure; but, at least, they knew nothing, and this was an immense relief, for their well-meant sympathy would have been torture to Doris, since they would certainly have condemned her father for his temporary rejection of their friend.

How she wondered what the "one condition" was. She felt sure Jack would fulfil it if within mortal's power.

She was sorry her father had been hard on him, and yet, girl-like, she gloried in her willingness to accomplish something difficult for her sake. Above all, she longed to go home and so escape what she most dreaded, a meeting with Sir James and his wife.

But this was not to be spared her. True, Douglas Melville himself wrote to his sister-in-law that two months' loneliness had been such dreary work he really could not spare Doris any longer; and as he made such grateful allusions to her kindness to his girl, and gave a warm invitation to Loney and Jessy to pay a visit to The Nook as soon as they left Brighton, Aunt Lucy was not in the least offended by Doris's sudden recall, but really believed its only reason to be Douglas Melville's loneliness.

The day was fixed for her journey, the train looked out; but Aunt Lucy's politeness would not bear of Doris leaving Brighton without saying good-bye to the Denisons.

"Such a favourite as you are with them all, my dear, it would be really unkind! I will go over with you myself this afternoon."

But callers defeated this kind intention, and in the end Doris went alone, which, on the whole, she rather preferred.

Lady Denison and Esther were out, but Sir James saw her from the window, came downstairs, and insisted on escorting her back to her aunt's.

"I wanted to speak to you, Doris. I have heard from Jack, and I can guess why you are going home so suddenly. My dear child, I should like you to know my wife and I would gladly have welcomed you as our boy's choice."

The tears stood in her blue eyes, but she was loyal to her father.

"Please don't be angry with father," she said, gently. "It is all my fault, for I knew he wanted me never to marry."

Sir James could not help smiling.

"My dear, I am not angry. Mr. Melville has been such a devoted father that I think even his prejudices deserve respect, and Jack does not write quite hopelessly. He says he still believes he shall one day bring you home to claim our welcome."

"He told me father made one condition, and that though it was a hard one, he meant to fulfil it."

Privately, Sir James believed that the barrister's objections arose from his almost morbid dread of Doris inheriting her mother's disease. He might have stipulated with Jack not to press his suit until three years had elapsed, and promised to consent then if Doris had showed no signs of consumption in the meantime. But the Baronet could trust his son, and would not even try to guess what Jack had kept back from him.

He held the girl's hand in his and wished her a pleasant journey almost tenderly, and then he went home to tell his wife he did not wonder at the boy's infatuation, for Doris Melville was the prettiest girl he had seen for years.

After Doris went home the party at Brighton soon broke up. The Paul Melvilles had to go home to welcome their school-going children, whose holidays were approaching.

The Denisons went back to The Moat, a little grave at the thought it was probably the very last Christmas they would spend at the old house; for if the anonymous letter was to be trusted, on the first of March the missing Helen would return to claim her own.

Jack was there before them. He seemed well and cheerful, but maintained perfect silence about his interview with Douglas Melville, excepting that when his father would have sympathised with him at the barrister's harshness he said gravely,—

"Please don't say a word against him, sir. I can't explain things now, but one day you will know all, and then you will agree with me that Douglas Melville is the noblest man you ever met."

Esther and Lionel were formally engaged by this time, and young Melville spent Christmas with his fiancée. But someone must have given him a hint not to mention his Cousin Doris, for he never once alluded to The Nook and its inmates.

"My dear boy, why are you poring over those old papers?" asked Sir James, when he went into Jack's study one night and found him with a pile of *Mapleton Gazette* of very ancient date in front of him. "What!" as he caught sight of the heading "*The Moat Tragedy*" in large letters. "Why in the world are you troubling your head about that? Let sleeping troubles rest."

"I was thinking of poor Helen," said Jack, gravely. "You said yesterday you expected her to come to Southshire in March. Have you ever thought what an awful ordeal awaits her? The whole neighbourhood will look on her as the child of a murderer, my grandmother first and foremost."

"Lady Alfreda will patronise her just to try and spite us," returned Sir James. "Yes, poor girl, I can imagine if she is in ignorance of her own history she will find things trying when she comes here. But it won't help her, Jack, for you to wade through those old papers."

"I think it will."

"How?"

Jack answered slowly, not because he did not know his own meaning, but because he feared to reveal to his father why he was so intensely interested in Helen Denison.

"I want to clear her mother's name and memory. It seems to me, sir, if I only study the case carefully enough I must get some clue to the criminal."

Sir James smiled sadly.

"It was tried at the time, my boy, by Paul Melville and his brother, both able men. To my mind the worst evidence against poor Arline was that no one else was ever so much as suspected of the murder."

"Father, she bore our name. She was a Denison by marriage. It is a disgrace to our whole family not to clear her memory."

A light broke on Sir James. He guessed the truth, in part only. He knew how much interest Douglas Melville had taken in the late Lady Denison. Perhaps to clear her

name was the lack of condition he had given Jack to fulfil before he allowed him to marry Doris. So far Sir James was right, but it never dawned on him that Doris was not the barrister's child at all, but the lost daughter of poor, ill-fated Arline.

"Please yourself, my boy," he said, cheerfully, "only I am afraid you have set yourself an impossible task!"

Poor Jack began to fear the same, when a month passed without giving him the slightest encouragement. At last he discovered something, only the merest trifle, but yet enough to prove that Arline Denison had a friend who remembered her faithfully after twenty years.

She was not buried with her husband; her dust lay in the unconsecrated portion of the Mapleton cemetery. Just a plain marble cross, with the one word "Arline," and the date of her birth and death, marked the spot. This much he had known for years. After Christmas some strange chance made Jack visit the lonely grave a second time; and, to his surprise, he found upon it a large wreath of Parma violets, whose sweetness filled the air, and which, from their freshness, must have been recently placed there.

"Ay, sir," said the cemetery keeper to Mr. Denison, as he came up. "If you notice the date on the cross, you'll see yesterday was the poor lady's birthday. Well, all the twenty years she's rested here the day has never passed without bringing violets. Sometimes it's been a fine wreath like this one—sometimes just a handful of flowers that wouldn't cost sixpence; but, few or many, the violets have never failed. A servant who lived at The Moat long ago told me once that violets were her lady's favourite flowers."

"Who brings them?"

"I've only seen him once or twice, but I reckon it's always the same hand. He's an old man, sir, with hair like snow, and I've wondered sometimes whether he could have been the poor lady's father. There's a look on his face as though he had known bitter sorrow; and no sorrow surely could be worse than seeing his daughter a felon!"

The word jarred on Jack painfully.

"Did you see him bring the violets yesterday? Where is he staying?"

"I saw him right enough, sir, and he spoke to me, a thing he had never done before. He asked me if Miss Helen Denison had been heard of."

"How strange!"

"I told him, sir, your father wouldn't give up hope, but everyone else believed she had been dead for years. He just put half a crown into my hand, and went off. A porter at the railway station told me he caught the afternoon train to London."

It took Jack hours of anxious thought before he hit on a means of attracting the stranger's notice. At last he drew up rather a lengthy advertisement headed "Violets." It ran as follows:—

"Violets! If the gentleman who, for twenty years, has carried violets to a lonely grave at Mapleton, really desires news of the young lady he inquired about yesterday, he can have full information by applying to J. D., 40, Backville-street, Clapham."

It was the address of Jack's curate brother. He knew Charles would take in any letters for him; and the young clergyman was so busy with his parish duties that he would have no time to study the agony column of the newspapers, and wonder what his brother was about by inserting such a remarkable advertisement.

Jack was not kept long in suspense. Before his advertisement had appeared a week he received a letter from Charles, enclosing another, addressed J. D.

"I cannot think," wrote the young curate, "to what matter this refers; but I should like to tell you what I know of the writer. Mr. Vincent is one of our most liberal parishioners—very old, apparently; and yet, in spite of his white hair and bowed figure, there are times when he seems to have almost

the energy of youth. He took a fancy to me when we first met, assured me he once knew a member of my family, and has cross-questioned me pretty freely as to the state of affairs at The Moat and our mysterious cousin. To-day I found him in a state of the wildest excitement. He accused me of spying upon him, and publishing his secrets in the newspapers."

"Really, it occurred to me he might be referring to the advertisement you said you had inserted, and I told him that, though the answers were sent to my rooms, I knew nothing about it. He put the letter I have enclosed into my hands, and urged me to send it quickly."

"He is in a pitiable state of excitement, besides which his health has for some time been failing rapidly. His doctor, whom I met as I was leaving, told me he might die at any moment."

"Dr. Browning says that Mr. Vincent is utterly alone in the world. He was formerly a popular actor, but on coming into a moderate fortune he gave up the stage, and set off on his travels."

"For years—according to the doctor—no one heard of him, and then he returned a prematurely old man, the mere wreck of his former self, and settled down to this monotonous existence at Clapham. If you prefer a personal interview I can put you up. I don't want to pry into your business, old fellow, only Vincent is miserably ill and unhappy. Don't be hard on him if he has wronged you!"

The next day John Denison called on Mr. Vincent. He found him on a couch drawn close to the fire, and better versed in such things than Charles or the cemetery-keeper. He knew at once that this was not an old man, but one whom some crushing calamity had prematurely wrecked.

"I want to tell you why I am here," said Jack, simply. "From a word you dropped at Mapleton, from your kindly care of her mother's grave, I fancy you would gladly befriend my cousin, Helen Denison. Am I right?"

"She is dead!" replied Hugh Vincent, coldly. "The child died with her mother. Do you think the daughter of a sensitive creature like Arline could have lived under the fearful legacy of shame that was her portion?"

"She lives! She was adopted by the barrister who defended her mother," said Jack, gravely. "She has no idea of her real name!"

"Then she has not suffered. Her life has not been shadowed by her mother's fate."

"The shadow has fallen now. I love her as my own life, and she returns my affection, but her adopted father will not let her become my wife. He says if ever Helen appeared in the neighbourhood of The Moat her resemblance to her mother would proclaim her identity. Only by keeping her aloof from all the people who knew poor Arline Denison can she escape a fearful legacy; and so you see our hopes are blighted. For my darling's own sake I cannot urge my suit unless a day comes when I have cleared her mother's memory."

"It was absurd to suspect Arline," said Vincent, bitterly. "To begin with, she was a good woman, and such do not commit murder even when wronged terribly, and then, brute though Denison was, she loved him. Why, she worshipped the ground he trod on, though he treated her like dirt, and was always saying she had married him for his money."

"Did you know him?"

"I knew her. We were in the same company. I was the star, and she the heroine. She played Juliet to my Romeo, and I would have fain persuaded her to accept the part in real life. I loved her as I never loved aught else on earth."

"And yet you never went near her during the last weeks of her life when, in her humiliation, she sorely needed friends?"

"Because I thought it would prejudice people against her. I was young then, and for

a young man to show friendship to a lovely woman who is neither his sister or betrothed only does harm. Why, they might even have thought she killed her husband—to marry me!"

"I never shall believe she did kill him," said Jack, solemnly. "I have seen her daughter, and I won't believe my darling's mother was a murderer!"

"You are quite right in your opinion. She was an unhappy, deeply injured woman."

"But how to prove it?" said Jack, with a heavy sigh. "I confess I despair of it."

"Never despair," said Hugh Vincent, gravely, "those near death see things more clearly than you who are in the hey-day of youth and strength. Believe me, Mr. Denison, you will yet marry your cousin, and when you stand by her side at the altar there will rest no cloud on her mother's memory."

"I fear you are too hopeful, sir."

"I think not, and you will not have long to wait. Mr. Denison, I have a strange fancy. When Arline's child is your happy wife will you take her to see my grave, and ask her to breathe one prayer for me?"

Jack remained a few days at Clapham. Hugh Vincent's words had moved him strangely, and he hoped for a second interview with the strange invalid, but it was not to be.

The fourth morning of his stay in Backville-street he sat down to breakfast alone, hearing that his brother had been called out to visit a deathbed.

He had finished his meal before Charles appeared, and with strangely solemn manner put into his brother's hand a folded sheet of paper.

"Mr. Vincent is dead, Jack, and I wrote this at his dictation, in the presence of Dr. Browning and a magistrate. He signed it only a few minutes before he died. He said I was to give it to you as his wedding present. His mind must have been wandering, poor fellow."

It was what Jack had thought it almost cruel to the dying man to expect—a full and free confession of his guilt. He and he alone had murdered Gilbert Denison from anger at his treatment of his wife. He never dreamed that suspicion would fall on Arline.

He went to London by the night mail, went on board a sailing vessel bound for Australia the next day, and when he was again within reach of letters and newspapers his beautiful lost love lay in her dishonoured grave. Her child had vanished, and to confess his guilt seemed a useless sacrifice!

He gave two proofs of the truth of his statement, each conclusive. The pistol which fired the fatal shot had been kept by the Denison family lawyer; the companion to it was still in Vincent's dressing case. There, too, was a trinket known to have been worn constantly by Sir Gilbert—the only valuable, in fact, missed from his body, and whose disappearance had been noticed by the defence as telling in Arline's favour.

It was a plain gold locket, with the monogram of husband and wife in seed pearls, and when opened disclosed on one side Arline's beautiful face, on the other a tress of her sunny hair.

Hugh Vincent's confession, though tardy, was effectual. It appeared in every English newspaper. The news of Arline's innocence was known all through the land, and people felt they could never forgive themselves for the cruel treatment meted out to her. Then, and not till then, Jack went down to The Nook and asked Douglas Melville to redeem his promise.

"I know she is a great heiress, and I am a poor man, but I don't want a penny of her money. Throw it into the sea if you like, Mr. Melville, but give me Doris."

"And your father?"

"I am afraid he won't like her being an heiress, but I can trust him not to misjudge me. My father won't think me a fortune-hunter, even if the world does."

"The world shall know you gave yourself

the task of proving her mother's innocence," said Douglas Melville, warmly. "I for one can never forget you were willing and anxious to marry her when we had little hope of unravelling the mystery of her father's death."

They were married in the early spring, and Doris—no one ever called her Helen—positively refused to allow Sir James and his wife to leave The Moat.

"Jack wants to live in London most of the year because of his books," she said, brightly. "And surely you won't refuse to take us in sometimes in the summer?"

In truth, Mrs. Denison never loved the old grey walls where her mother had suffered so much. In time to come she might perhaps be proud of it as her children's inheritance. But at present her only feeling was a dread of the grim old place and its sad history.

She clung to Douglas Melville with all a daughter's affection, and told Jack frankly she should never like any other home so much as The Nook.

As Jack had a great admiration and a warm gratitude for the barrister he did not resent the wish Doris expressed one day just before her wedding that they might all live together "till they quarrelled."

Mr. Melville is nominally the master of The Nook, yet Jack Denison never feels he is not in his own house; and the somewhat rash experiment has now gone on for five years, and still "the quarrel has not come."

Doris declares it never will, and Jack is inclined to agree with her. He likes Douglas Melville more and more every year. He will never forget the love and care the barrister lavished on the helpless child he believed must inherit A FEARFUL LEGACY.

[THE END.]

JAMES ROOKE'S STRATAGEM.

—O—

JAMES ROOKE stood on the post-office steps, glancing dubiously at a yellow-enveloped letter, which he had just received at the general delivery.

It was addressed to his wife; but he opened it, nevertheless. Of course Mrs. Rooke would have no secrets from him.

The letter, which was written in a crabbed, inexperienced hand, was as follows,—

"DEAR EMMIE,—Has you have been married for eight onto six months now, you must have got settled and put to rights, and these few lines are to let you know I am coming to see you, which I have threatened to come for a good while, but aren't had a good chance; and I'm going to start the day after to-morrow. Providence permitting, and if you and your husband are agreeable, I shall probably stay all summer. Yours affectionately,

"F. BELT."

"F. Belt! That must be Emmie's mother, beyond a doubt," reflected Mr. Rooke, while cold chills ran up and down his back, as his brain rapidly assimilated the unwelcome tidings.

Not that he had any special antipathy to his wife's mother. Indeed, he had never seen her in his life, having wooed, won, and wedded the present Mrs. Rooke in a Scotch town, where she held a position as telegraph operator, over a hundred miles from the rural village in England where her mother and sisters resided.

But he had an unconquerable aversion to mothers-in-law as a rule, and had so far enjoyed a happy immunity from intrusion on the part of his wife's maternal ancestor.

"I didn't marry the whole family," he was wont to declare, "and I don't intend to be saddled with 'em."

And yet, in the face of this oft-repeated declaration, here was this letter announcing the contemplated invasion of his domicile, and that, too, at a speedy date.

Mr. Rooke frowned as he vainly racked his brain in the attempt to devise some means of averting the dreadful calamity.

He pondered the situation thoroughly, and at last his brow cleared, and a smile of satisfaction relaxed the stern determination of his countenance.

"There's more ways of killing a cat than choking it to death on gingerbread," he muttered, complacently, turning his steps in the direction of the trim cottage which he rented at present, but which he hoped, in the course of a year or so, to be able to purchase.

The letter was carefully concealed in the inner pocket of his vest, secure from detection.

Dinner was already on the table, and Mrs. Rooke, a pretty little woman with brown eyes, and hair of that reddish tinge supposed to be token a spice of temper, stood in the doorway awaiting her husband's return.

The roast mutton and green peas had been disposed of, and Mrs. Rooke was beginning to dish out the dessert of strawberries and cream, when her husband remarked, with a look of concern,—

"My dear, you are looking pale to-day. Do you feel quite well?"

"Pale! Do I?" asked Emmie, somewhat startled. "Come to think of it, I have felt a little out of sorts—languid, you know, and not much appetite—"

"Exactly," interrupted Mr. Rooke. "You mope too much, dear. You need a change of air and scenery—something to liven you up."

"Change of air!" echoed Emmie, with a sigh. "Oh, Jem, if I only could! But we could never afford it. You are a poor man, you know."

"What if I am? I can afford my wife an outing once in a while, I suppose," declared Jem, with some compunctions of conscience at his own duplicity.

"There is your old friend, Bessie Smith, who has been urging you to visit her at Fernley. Why not go for a week or so?"

"And leave you alone?" asked Emmie, doubtfully.

"Oh, don't worry about me! My sister would be glad to come and keep house for me, I've no doubt," urged Jem, determined to carry his point.

And Emmie, who was really delighted at the prospect of visiting her old friend, made no more objections.

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Jem Rooke was seated in a rustic chair on the front porch, calmly perusing the evening paper, when a short, stout old lady, in a snuff-coloured bombazine dress, with a handbag on her arm, came slowly waddling up the neat walk toward the house.

"Do the Rookes live here?" she demanded, in a rasping, nasal voice.

The master of the house responded in the affirmative.

"I'm glad of it," ejaculated the visitor, pushing her way into the house uninvited. "I've walked every step of the way from the station, an' I'm done up."

And she plumped herself into a cushioned chair, with a groan of relief.

"I must say, I should have thought Emmie would have sent to meet me," she grumbled, "and not left me to come traipsing out here all alone."

Mr. Rooke smiled grimly.

"Emmie is not at home," he condescended to explain.

"Not at home?" wheezed the old lady. "That accounts for it then, I suppose. But I reckon you know who I am, don't you?"

"I presume you are Mrs. Belt," was the cold response.

"Just so," nodded the visitor. "But where is Emmie gone to? Run over to some of the neighbours, I reckon. I hope she isn't in the habit of gadding. When did you say she'd be home?"

"I couldn't say," returned Mr. Rooke, with studied indifference. "She went to stay

several weeks with an old friend, fifty miles from here."

With a gasp of consternation, Mrs. Belt started up.

"Good gracious! I wouldn't have believed Emmie would have gone off visiting, after I wrote I was coming to stay the summer. A pretty way to treat me, I must say! But maybe she went before my letter arrived."

"She started the day after your letter arrived," amended Mr. Rooke, with inward exultation.

It was heartless of him, very. But he was not going to be worried by such a mother-in-law—all summer, too! He must let her see, once for all, that he had not "married the whole family!" as he expressed it.

"When can I get a train to go back by?" demanded Mrs. Belt, in an offended voice, beginning to re-tie her bonnet strings.

"Not till to-morrow morning."

"Then I shall have to stay all night, I reckon, though it goes against the grain to stay where I am not wanted."

"Step out to the kitchen and have a cup of tea, Mrs. Belt," urged Miss Rooke, who was kinder-hearted than her brother, and who had no foolish prejudices against mothers-in-law.

And with a sigh of relief James Rooke went back to his paper, while poor, disappointed Mrs. Belt felt considerably refreshed, after her cup of tea, with cold sliced ham and light rolls for an accompaniment.

She slept in the spare bed that night, and took her departure the next morning, without a word of protest from Mr. Rooke.

A couple of weeks later Emmie returned home, looking fresh and rosy after her trip, and her husband mentally congratulated himself on the success of his stratagem.

His triumph was destined to be of short duration, however.

"Jem, Jem!" cried Mrs. Rooke, as he returned from the office one evening, "what ever does this letter mean? I was out shopping, and went to the post office with a letter, and received this from Aunt Ellen. Do read it and tell me what it means!"

And, with some inward tribulation, John read:—

"TO MRS. EMMA ROOKE: When I wrote that I was coming to see you, I didn't mention that I had made a fortune off my land, which it was full of iron. And being as I am alone woman I was going to leave the whole of it to you; but seeing you went off visiting after getting my letter, and Mr. Rooke never even so much as invited me to take my bonnet off, I shall leave my money to my brother's folks, except five hundred pounds to Miss Jane Rooke, for being so obliging in getting me a bit to eat—which Mr. Rooke never spoke, but sat and read his paper, and kept as mum as a mouse in a meal chest.—Yours to hand,

"ELLEN BELT."

So it was not her mother after all, but her aunt—and a rich aunt at that!

"What does she mean, Jem?" demanded Emmie.

But Jem hung his head guiltily. There was nothing to be done but make a clean breast of it, however, and Mrs. Rooke was properly indignant at the result.

Indeed, the "spice of temper" in her composition cropped out, and she gave her crest-fallen husband a piece of her mind which he richly deserved.

After a reasonable time she forgave him, however, but Aunt Ellen never did, and Jem Rooke is still a poor man; but he has never ventured to suppress another of his wife's letters, and has so far improved as to give his mother-in-law a polite reception when she visits them.

BRUSSELS, Wilton, and Axminster carpets are now made in double widths, and in some makes it is possible to carpet a wide room without a seam.

FACETIÆ.

Why is a defeated candidate like the earth? Because he is flattened at the polls.

It is now a disputed point which makes the more mistakes—the weather prophets or the weather.

HEER HAULER: "What do think of my voice, madam?" She: "I don't think of it if I can help it."

"Do you play the banjo?" "Not when there are any people around." "Why not?" "They won't let me."

Spring should be represented as a young man with an ulcer and the rheumatism. At least that is the kind of a spring we are having.

The difference between a man and woman washing his or her face is, that all men rub up and down, and snort. All women apply the water and stroke gently downward.

BITTERS.—Dr. Brush: "Would you advise me to have my picture hung?" Easel: "No; solitary confinement ought to be sufficient."

What is more pathetic than to see the simple faith with which a bald-headed man will buy an infallible hair restorative from a bald-headed hairdresser?

Men can be found who are willing to go to Africa as missionaries, who are not willing to take a cross baby from the tired wife for half-an-hour.

PHOTOGRAPHER: "Now, sir, if you'll look a little less as though you had a bill to meet, and a little more as though you'd been left a legacy, you'll make a beautiful picture."

"STRANGE," mused Mr. Waybacke at the German opera on Friday night, "that all those rich ladies should spend so much money for dresses, and get so little of them."

VISITOR: "What are you painting?" Artist (sarcastically): "Can't you see?" Visitor (sweetly): "Yes, I see it is a flower. Have you decided yet what to call it?"

"Why, you poor malarial mortal, you! I thought you told me your average health was good?" "So I did. I run to chills one day and fever the next. The average is normal."

"GREAT SCOT, man, you look as though you had been wrestling with a cyclone! Where have you been?" "Worse than that! I displayed a sovereign at a church bazaar."

When a girl is sixteen her ideal man is named Reginald. When she is twenty-four it doesn't matter to her very much what his name is as long as it will work well on the business end of a cheque.

EQUAL TO ANY EMERGENCY.—Wife: "Did you post that letter I gave you?" Husband: "Certainly." Wife: "I wish you hadn't. There is something I wish to add to it. Husband (producing letter): "Why didn't you say so before? Here it is."

WAITER (to cook): "George, gent in No. 3 says as his potatoes ain't good—says as they've all got black eyes in 'em. George (real name Patrick): "Bedad, thin, it's no fault o' mine. The spalpeens must have been fighting after I put them in the pot."

A SPIRITUALIST asks: "Did you ever go into a dark room where you could see nothing and feel that there was something there?" Yes, frequently, and the something unfortunately chanced to be a mahogany table against which we barked our shins.

AT BRIGHTON.—Wife: "I am going to economise in our household, George." Husband: "Why, you prudent little soul, how?" "I am going to discharge our servant, and get an older person." "Well, that will be no good; the older one will demand just as much wages." Wife (looking at him straight): "Very likely, Mr. Brown, but you won't need to give her half-crowns; and what kisses you want you may have from me—me, sir."

GERMAN Professor of Music: "You must not reach over dot on *de treble*. Dat vas not right." Independent American Boy: "I guess I'll reach where I please on this piano. It's not your piano; it's our piano. I'll put my feet on it if I see fit."

MRS. GADD: "Did you ever? Mrs. Nawed has had her bridal slippers silver-plated." Mrs. Gabb: "Land Skates! I'm glad there wasn't any such silly fashion when I was married." Little Johnny (moving uneasily): "So'm I."

NOT A CLOTH CONNECTION.—McFingle: "The girl in the telephone exchange seems to be too high flown for her position." McFangle: "No wonder! She is connected with some of the best families in town." "Indeed? How?" "By wire!"

"Why, oh! why do all men join in the mad rush for gold?" shrieked a female lecturer who had accumulated a great many years, but no husband. "Because," yelled someone in the back of the house, "they have to do it to keep the women in clothes!"

IN A POLICE COURT.—"How many times have you been sentenced before, prisoner?" "I don't 'zactly 'member, yer honour, but I'm sure the last time was over five years ago." "How so?" "Cause, yer honour, I hain't been enter jail since."

BETWEEN SERVANT GIRLS.—The Chambermaid to the Cook: "If the proprietor doesn't take back those words he used to me last night, I shan't stay one single day longer in this house." "Why, what did he say to you?" "He told me I could look for another place."

MISS D.: "Angelina, why don't you marry Lieut. X?" MISS A.: "First, because he has no brains—and he can't ride, dance, or play tennis. What could we do with him?" MISS D.: "But he swims beautifully." MISS A.: "Oh, yes; but one can't keep one's husband in an aquarium, you know."

"YOUNG MAN: "I see you advertise a vacancy in your establishment. I should like to have a position where there will be a chance to rise." Merobant: "Well, I want a man to open up and sweep out. You will have a chance to rise every morning at five o'clock."

MAMMA (from the next room, hearing a suspiciously sibilant noise followed by a scream): "What was that, Agnes?" Mr. Sissy (who lies, but is equal to the occasion): "That wath a mouh; it thirtled Mith Agnoeth." Mamma (who has been young herself): "Yes; I thought it was. Don't do it again, please."

THE PASSING OF BORNICH.—Returned Tourist: "What has become of Bornich? He was a prince of good fellows. Everybody liked him. So genial and generous!" Resident: "Oh, he's got to be a regular nuisance. Here he comes now. Let's dodge into an alley-way." Tourist: "Spent all his money, eh?"

PRAYER: "What is the point at issue in the case of Jaggs versus Henderson, which has been dragging through the courts so long?" Lawyer: "The trouble began over the ownership of a valuable dog. The litigation has been going on for about six years, and has cost the contestants nearly four thousand pounds so far." Prayer: "Who will win the dog eventually, do you think?" Lawyer: "The dog? Oh, he died early in the second year."

A LANCASHIRE newspaper tells the following good story: An old country gentleman, returning home rather late, discovered a yokel with a lantern under his kitchen window, who, when asked his business there, stated that he had come a-courting. "Come awahat?" said the irate gentleman. "A-courting, sir; I'm courting Mary." "It's a lie!" exclaimed the old gentleman. "What do you want a lantern for? I never used one when I was a young man." "No, sir," was the yokel's reply; "I don't think yer 'ad, udging by the misis!"

STRENGTH and health go together—with the exception of butter.

To keep mouths out of old clothing—Give the clothing to the poor.

Be virtues and you will be happy, as well as odd and eccentric.

EVERY one admires a man of push, but nobody wants to be the person pushed aside by the man.

He who is described as "One in 1,000" very often thinks the other figures beside him mere ciphers.

MAUD: "George told me last night I was his little duck." Ethel: "He probably discovered that you were no chicken."

THERE wouldn't be so many tired people in the world if men would stop climbing hills before they get to them.

TRACHER: "Freddy, how is the earth divided?" Freddy: "Between them that's got it and them that wants it."

WHILE some people are very particular as to whom they talk with, a mate would like to be on speaking terms with almost anybody.

DISAPPOINTMENT first comes in life to the baby who has a tin trumpet given to him for a present and then finds he hasn't wind enough to blow it.

MRS. NOKAR: "Do you think my daughter will be a musician?" Professor: "I gant say. She may. She tell me she gome of a long-lived familly."

THE human race is divided into two classes—those who go ahead and do something, and those who sit still and inquire, "Why wasn't it done the other way?"

AUNTIE: "Johnny, you never hear your papa use such language." Johnny: "No; and I take mighty good care that he doesn't hear me."

"Was your elopement a success?" "Hardly." "What went wrong?" "Her father telegraphed us not to return and all would be forgiven."

A TRUE woman can never look with complete respect upon the man who is willing to admit that the other children may be just as bright as his own.

THE average housewife will take more pains to keep a sickly plant through four months of winter, than she will to keep butter on ice during three months of solid hot weather in summer.

OLD MR. HUSTLE (to young lady applicant for position of typewriter): "Can you spell well?" Young Lady Applicant: "Yes, sir, ordinarily; but I sometimes get tangled up when it comes to 'artesian'."

NURSE: "Tommy, this is your new sister." Tommy: "Where did she come from?" Nurse: "From Heaven." Tommy (in deep disgust): "I don't wonder they wanted to get rid of her."

"We had some mind-reading at our house last night. Johnny hid a pin, and the new minister tried to find it." "And did he succeed?" "Oh, yes; he found it when he sat down."

"Now," said the captain of the leaky and unseaworthy steamer, "now we shall see for ourselves; and then the storm burst with inconceivable fury. "What shall we see?" screamed the passengers, in his ears, above the roaring of the gale. "Whether the United States Coast Survey is right or not when it says the Pacific Ocean has a sandy bottom."

At a watering-place in the Pyrenees the conversation at table turned upon a wonderful echo to be heard some distance off on the Franco-Spanish frontier. "It is astonishing," exclaimed an inhabitant of the Garonne. "As soon as you have spoken you hear distinctly the voice leap from rock to rock, from precipice to precipice, and as soon as it has passed the frontier the echo assumes the Spanish accent."

SOCIETY.

Four or five white pinka massed closely so as to seem like one flower is the favoured boutonniere of the season.

The most exalted personages in Germany have been working hard to bring about a reconciliation between the Emperor and Prince Bismarck.

PRINCE GEORGE will be promoted this month, and the expiration of his happy command of the *Thrush* will be regretted by all on board.

It is now admitted on all sides that jet means to stay definitely with us, for dress-makers and milliners have confessed their inability to manage without it either in summer or winter.

One of the best methods of obtaining notice for charitable appeals is to enclose them in scented pink envelopes, and address them in a mincing lady's handwriting to the "pater-familias." At least, they say so.

The Duchess of Portland appears to be setting fashionable mothers as good an example as her popular husband has offered to landlords and horse-owners. She is very proud of her little baby, and is not ashamed to say so.

The Queen's visit to Grasse is believed to have cost the Privy Purse about £9,000. The principal expenses were the railway journeys between Cherbourg and Grasse, and the hotel bill, the first item in the latter account being a charge of £120 per day for rent of the house and grounds.

SAN SEBASTIAN, which has gradually become the rendezvous of fashionable French society, is preparing for an unusually prolonged season, as the Queen Regent and the young King of Spain are expected there a full month before the time they have arrived there in former years. The King is not strong, and no place suits his health like San Sebastian.

The King of Siam, like his deceased Royal brother of Hawaii, has more names than are convenient when signing his "full" cognomen to official documents. "Lomdetch Phra Paramindr Maha Chulalong Koru Phra Chula Chom Klao"—that is all.

ARTHUR, DUKE OF CORNAUGHT, has just completed his forty-first year. He came into the world the year before the Great Exhibition, which was the first of its kind; and was made the subject of a very pretty picture, when a year old, of the Queen holding her baby up to receive a present from his grandfather, the Iron Duke.

The last of the Borgias, a grandson of the well-known Don Alberto di Borgia, died recently in extreme poverty. For the last twenty years he has been struggling to gain a livelihood as a photographer. To think of a Borgia being a photographer! Why, in comparatively modern days, the Borgias were the most powerful family in Europe. No race was ever more gifted with brains or good looks, and no race ever made a worse use of its gifts.

The little King of Spain has been sitting to a sculptor, for a statue that his Lady Mother desires to have of her small Monarch of five years and a half. There was a good deal of difficulty in getting a pose suited to the artist's taste, until, one morning, as the sculptor was trying to get his little model into an attitude that should be both characteristic and becoming, a regiment passed the Palace with the band playing. Alfonso XIII. started up, with his hand to his forehead, crying out, "Listen, Senor! There goes the flag of the nation! Salute!" The delighted sculptor saw at once that no better pose could be chosen in which to represent the enthusiastic little King than in the act of saluting his kingdom's flag, and told Queen Christina of his decision. The child overheard him, and cried out, "Oh, then, do please, make me tall—very tall, and with a long moustache!"

STATISTICS.

Six thousand nine hundred and fifty-nine is the number of public houses in London.

There are 556 lighthouses on the British coast.

A cubic foot of oak weighs nearly double as much as a cubic foot of fir.

In 1845 a penny income-tax would have produced £500,000; now, it would produce £2,200,000.

"If I am asked," says Sir William Jones, who is the greatest man? I answer, the best. And if I am required to say who is the best, I reply, he that has deserved most of his fellow-creatures."

ASIA is returned as having 830,599,000 population; Europe, 349,873,300; Africa, 203,821,000; America, 121,335,000. Australia and Polynesia and Polarland together maintain a modest 4,500,000. Taking the average of Europe, less than ninety-four people are found to one square mile. Asia has forty-eight persons to the square mile, Africa eighteen, America ten. Less than two persons are found to the square mile in Australia and Polynesia. Polarland maintains about one person to every twenty miles.

GEMS.

FORGETTING is a lazy, careless habit mind which can be cured.

It is a very curious man, indeed, who has not some women in the world who exaggerates his virtues.

FINE sense and exalted sense are not half as useful as common sense. He that will carry nothing about him but gold will be every day at a loss for readier change.

A MAN is a good deal like a machine. By the time he gets himself in good running order, and pays for himself, and learns how to do his work with some sort of comfort, he is marked old and out of order.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TO PRESERVE EGGS.—Slake a quantity of lime in a tub or barrel; let it stand overnight; next morning pour off the water until the thick creamy lime is left; now put three inches of that in a barrel; stick eggs in it end up, put on another layer of lime cream, fill in more eggs, and so on till the barrel is within three inches of being filled; occupy that space with a final layer of the cream.

MOLASSES CAKE.—One and a half cupfuls of sugar, the same of butter, the same of molasses, four cupfuls of flour, and four eggs; beat the eggs light; add the sugar and butter, mix well together, then stir in the molasses; stir it all well, and add two tablespoonfuls of ginger; one teaspoonful of sour cream with a teaspoonful of soda in it, added just before baking, stirring it in well.

NORMANDY PIPPINS.—Sleep the fruit, after well washing them, in the following: Stir half a teaspoonful of ground ginger and the same of powdered cinnamon in a quart of water; leave the fruit in this for about twelve hours, then pour it all into a stewpan, add the strained juice of a small lemon and some of the rind very thinly pared, together with half pound of moist sugar, and let it all stew very gently till the pippins are quite tender (this takes from two to three hours), adding half pound more sugar when the fruit is about half cooked. Some cooks omit the first steeping, and simply put the pippins on in the water with a few cloves, the lemon, and sugar, and let it all simmer together till done; but, of course, more time must be allowed for the cooking than by the first method.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Wood is used as fuel on Russian and Swedish railways.

CHINA for the first time in her history has begun to make silver coins.

STATISTICS prove that only one man in a million lives to be 108 years old.

ENGLAND possesses nearly nine-tenths of the wealth of the British Isles.

An ounce of tobacco will fill twelve ordinary pipes.

SUICIDE is less prevalent amongst miners than any other class of people.

THERE have been eleven thousand rejections from the Royal Academy.

A THIRD of the telegrams dispatched in England daily are sent from London offices.

As regards a name for the Exhibition, how would "Jacheries" do—"for they all love Jack."

CONSIDERING comfort and convenience, living is cheaper in London than in any other city of Europe.

HENRY V. was the first king after the Conquest who built ships for the defence of the coast.

THE increasing popularity of stamp-collecting may pretty well be gauged by its journals, one of which alone has a circulation of 5,000 monthly.

One remarkable peculiarity of the grip in Japan was its prevalence among the upper classes, whereas the cholera selected its victims among the poorer people.

THE largest reservoir or artificial lake in the world is the great tank of Dhebar, twenty miles south-east of Udaipur, Rajputana, which covers an area of twenty-one square miles.

RUBENS received for his painting of the grand ceiling at the banqueting-house, Whitehall, the sum of £4,000. The space covered by this painting is about four hundred yards, so that he was paid nearly £10 a yard.

A COMMISSION appointed by the Russian Government to investigate the matter recommends that there be no more exiles to Siberia. Instead, there will be more penitentiaries, while Siberia is to be thrown open to free colonisation.

BLOOD MONEY was the compensation paid by a homicide to the next-of-kin of the person slain, securing the offender and his relatives against subsequent retaliation. It was once common in Teutonic and Scandinavian countries, and is still a custom among the Arabs.

IN the Dominion of Canada alone 954,000 square miles await the explorer. The Dominion Survey and Geographical Departments are at present actively pursuing a thorough survey of the Rocky Mountain region, where there are many lofty peaks which have never been measured.

THE dahlia derived its name from the Swedish botanist, Professor Dahl, who first cultivated it. This beautiful flower was brought from Mexico, of which it is a native, in the present century. It soon became a favourite in this country, and in 1815, about two months after the Battle of Waterloo, it was introduced into France.

AN excellent substitute for a hot-water bag is a sand bag. It retains the heat much longer. Get clean, dry sand, and fill a flannel bag eight inches square with it. Cover this bag with cotton or linen. It is well to have several of these bags on hand in case of illness. In case of neuralgia a salt bag more readily got hold of is quite as efficacious in allaying pain.

RUSSIAN officers do not seek the advantage of the new smokeless powder. They look upon the smoke of the guns as a great protection, acting as a screen; while with smokeless powder the army is in plain sight of the enemy. But there would seem to be two sides to this question. The smoke that shuts off the enemy's view also shuts off the view of the enemy.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

"A FAIR BARBARIAN."—No rain falls in Egypt.

FUNCH.—The landlord alone can distrain for debt.

SHAMROCK.—Ireland sends 103 members to Parliament.

S. S.—You can be married for ten shillings, but you must give three weeks' notice.

KATE HELMNA.—You had better apply to a house decorator.

JORY.—You had better get your dressmaker to assist you in the matter. We cannot suggest anything.

MIGNONNE DIAMANTE.—You will get the information you require at any post office. Your writing is legible.

BARBARA.—It is altogether now too late for you to do anything.

A. T. L.—A father can be summoned for the non-attendance of his son at school.

CONSTANT READER.—If the removal was clandestine the landlord can follow and distrain.

L. S. D.—Every receipt for £2 and upwards must bear a penny stamp.

CREDITOR.—A creditor cannot seize a debtor's goods without legal authority.

BLACK FAIRCE.—Kettledrum and Merry Hampton each completed the Derby course in 2 min. 45 sec.

H. A. L.—The rock is not included in the schedule of the Wild Birds Protection Act.

EMPLOYEE.—Receipt stamps are not required in taking wages.

DOROTHEA.—Every will must be proved, and the proper fees paid, under a heavy penalty.

R. B.—If a wife dies leaving no will her husband takes all which it was in the wife's power to dispose of.

SKILL.—You had better write to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W.

SUBSCRIBER.—An abridgement order may be enforced by imprisonment, but a warrant must be first issued.

L. B.—You are legally entitled to leave the whole of your property to your children, and none to your wife.

DEBTOR.—A debt unacknowledged for fourteen years cannot be recovered.

HELEN.—No one would be legally entitled to open a letter addressed to the inmate of a workhouse.

FRIAR TUCK.—The middle verse of the Bible is the 5th verse of the 118th Psalm.

MAC.—What you want to know is entirely a military matter. You had better inquire at the orderly room of the regiment.

WORRIED TENANT.—A yearly tenant must give and can claim six months' notice, to expire at the quarter of entry.

HUGENOT.—The Massacre of St. Bartholomew cost the lives of 70,000 Protestants in eight days throughout all France.

ONE IN A FIX.—A landlord may prevent the removal of a lodger's goods until all arrears of rent have been satisfied.

ONE IN TROUBLE.—Yes, widows of freemasons in needy circumstances get relief from benevolent fund. Apply to lodge.

"BUBBLER."—A little glycerine put into suds for blowing soap-bubbles will make the bubbles better and brighter.

MINORITY.—A person under age may be appointed an executor to a will; but he cannot act until he is twenty-one.

PHYLLIS.—We cannot undertake to give you any advice under the circumstances. Consult a respectable solicitor.

YOUNG WIFE.—To make an excellent liniment for burns, take equal quantities of fresh linseed oil, olive oil, and lime water. Shake well together, and apply.

COCKNEY.—Old Vauxhall was in Bloomsbury. It was closed in 1849 or 1850, the estate being bought by the Victoria Society in March, 1850.

WORRIED MISTRESS.—The rule of notice in domestic service is one month on either side, if there is no agreement to the contrary.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—A debtor is only committed to prison for contempt of Court when he can pay the order made upon him, but refuses to do so.

RALPH.—You cannot "apprentice a boy by word of mouth." An agreement such as you name would not be legally binding.

GLAUCUS.—The foundering of the *London* was on January 11, 1866. The explosion at the Oaks Colliery, near Barnsley, was on December 12, 1866.

IGNORANT ONE.—It is usual to give notice; but as to liability a good deal would depend on circumstances, and the terms by which the room was hired.

HAPPY-GO-LUCKY.—The hire of a tricycle would, as a rule, be liable for damages, unless he could show that the machine was defective.

BERTIE.—The trade that is easiest to learn is the one a fellow has a liking for, simply because he gives his mind to the learning of it, or, in other words, puts his heart into it.

ALEC.—John Smith, jun., Esq., is correct. The man must come before his condition, and "jun." is part of the name, being necessary to his identity.

ART.—1. Balfe, the composer, was unquestionably of Irish descent; that is well known. 2. Milais is French, and is pronounced Milay.

VALENTINE.—1. A post-mortem examination is one made by medical men upon a dead body. 2. There are no coroner's inquests in Scotland.

PHIL.—The usual definition of a city is the see or seat of a bishop; and this holds true to the cities of England and Wales with a few exceptions.

DIANA.—Absolute right to the use of light for a dwelling-house is obtained by the enjoyment of it for twenty years without interruption.

ONE IN AFFLICTION.—The wife has full legal protection against her husband with respect to her separate property. If necessary apply to the justices for protection.

BILLION.—In this country a billion is a million millions, figured—1,000,000,000,000; in France it is a thousand millions, figured thus—1,000,000,000.

P. T. R.—In buying shares you should ascertain from the stockbroker what are the liabilities. The holder of the share is liable for the unpaid-up capital represented.

CURIOSITY.—The crackling sound of freshly-ignited wood or coal is caused by the air or liquid contained in the pores expanding by heat and bursting the covering in which it is confined.

J. B.—The woman cannot get a divorce until the man has been four years away from her, except she can ascertain that he has been since he left her, or for a part of the time, residing with another woman.

PIEKER.—The question is one for the judge. You cannot be imprisoned for debt, but if there is reason to believe that you can pay, and will not, you may be sent to gaol for contempt of court.

A REVISED FABLE.

You may say, "The grapes are sour,"
Smiling add, "They're hanging high,"
And it is not in my power
Those assertions to deny.

But I'd like to turn the tables,
And display the other side;
For I sometimes think old fables
Show extremely narrow pride.

And the fox—poor, ancient creature!
Has been most misand'rected;
For he surely had one feature
Which we all consider good.

When we lose a hope, most obliterated,
Who of us does not feel sad?
But the fox, when he has perished,
Made the most of what he had.

C. H.

BRUTUS.—A lodger's goods are not liable for his landlord's debts; but in case of distress he must give a list of them, and tender to the superior landlord any rent due from his immediate landlord.

MARLAN.—Try rubbing your hands with glycerine or vaseline at night before going to bed, and then sleeping in gloves. That will have the desired effect, and is less trouble. Your writing, though rather peculiar, is legible.

S. T. A. W.—Not knowing where you live, we cannot give you the address of the office. The cost is only 10s. without a House, but in that case you must give three weeks' notice. The cost with a House is £2 10s., when only one day's notice is necessary.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—Husband and wife separating by mutual agreement must decide as to the custody of children. As a rule the law would give the mother custody of young children, unless there was a good reason to the contrary.

RELATIVE.—1. If the mother of the person referred to was your grandfather's sister the person was your father's cousin, therefore your second cousin. 2. Your sister's son-in-law is not related to you at all. He is your sister's son-in-law, that is all.

BROKEN HEARTED.—A wife deserted by her husband has no remedy except through the Poor-law Guardians. If the husband goes abroad the wife is practically helpless. Should she follow him she may have difficulty in obtaining redress under alien laws.

ALWYNER.—A widow is only liable for her late husband's debts to the value of any property she inherited from him. In this case she should refuse to sign any paper making herself liable. If she is sued in the county court she must appear, and explain the facts.

A READER.—The words "What's gone and past help should be past grief," are a variation of a proverb current in many forms. For example, Shakespeare has "Past cure is still past care" ("Love's Labour's Lost"); and the same idea has been expressed in many ways.

LOVER OF THE SEA.—The term of a sea-apprenticeship is four years. The apprentice is bound for that period. In some cases a premium of from £10 to £40 is required with him. In other cases a written guarantee only is asked for; in others again a deposit is claimed which is repaid on the completion of the apprenticeship. In very few instances a wage of perhaps £10 yearly is paid; in most, nothing is given.

CLAUDIUS.—There is a long list of persons exempt from serving on juries. What "profession" do you allude to? The clergy, lawyers, doctors, and army and navy officers are, for instance, included in the exemptions.

UNHAPPY ANNIE.—As a rule the first month is a month on trial, and a girl can leave at the end of the month if she wishes to, or her mistress may send her away; but notice to that effect should be given as soon as possible, and not left till the last day.

SCHOOLBOY.—The edict of Milan was a proclamation issued by Constantine after the conquest of Italy (A.D. 313) to secure to the Christians the restitution of their civil and religious rights, of which they had long been deprived, and to establish throughout his extended dominions the principles of an enlightened toleration.

FEDERATION.—A person walking has equal rights on the highway with a person riding or driving, notwithstanding that there may be a footpath on either side. The person riding or driving is legally responsible for using all reasonable precaution against endangering the safety of the person on foot.

LEO.—Alfred Tennyson was the third of twelve children. He was born in 1809. His father was a minister, from whom he received his early education. He was subsequently sent to Trinity College, Cambridge, where in 1829 he gained the chancellor's medal for a poem in blank verse entitled "Timbuctoo." He married in 1851 Emily, daughter of Henry Sellwood.

FLORA.—Roots generally go down into the soil at once; but some roots come from different parts of the stem and grow in the air first. In the banyan tree of India roots sprout from all parts of the branches and run down into the earth, thus forming many stem-like roots which help to hold up the limbs of this wide-spreading tree.

BARTON.—The public or national debt is the amount of the sums or obligations owing by the nation. In modern times it has been customary in most countries, on the occurrence of any circumstances that occasioned a considerable increase of expense, to borrow either the whole or some portion thereof, paying a certain stipulated interest for the same.

AGATE.—The agate is the stone that is said to give luck to the person born in June, and the calendar verse for this month is as follows:

"Who comes with summer to this earth,
And owes to June her hour of birth,
With ring of agate on her hand,
Can health, wealth, and long life command."

ANXIOUS FATHER.—The lad could not obtain damages, because the master, on proving the lad's misbehaviour, would be held justified in dismissing him instantly. There being no stamped agreement between them, the lad is not entitled to the legal privilege of an apprentice; but, apart altogether from the misbehaviour, could be dismissed at any time with the warning customary in the trade.

HOUSEWIFE.—To make Italian cream, put two pints of cream into two bowls; in one bowl mix six ounces of sugar, the juice of two lemons, and two glasses of wine. Then add the other pint of cream, and stir it all together very hard; boil two ounces of isinglass in four teacups of water until it is reduced one-half, then stir it lukewarm into the other ingredients, and put it into a glass dish to cool, and serve.

ECCLÉSIASTICAL.—The Established Church of England is an episcopal institution, governed by two archbishops and twenty-six bishops, who, though nominally elected by the clergy of each diocese, are in reality appointed by the Premier for the time being. The two archbishops and twenty-four of the bishops have seats in the House of Peers, and the last appointed member of the bench is, *ex-officio*, the Chaplain of their Lordship's House.

STRIPED BOY.—Regarding the spelling of proper names, it is more a matter of taste than rule. Thus, in the name you mention, it is spelled both ways: "Sybil" and "Sibyl." But when a Pagan prophesies is meant by one using the name, it should be spelled "Sibyl," as that is the standard authority in that respect; but if you wish to name your daughter "Sybil," you have a right to do so.

S. L.—To make a strong and durable paste for printers' use, take one quart of good wheat flour and two gallons of cold water. Mix, and rub out with the hands all lumps that are formed by the flour. Then add about one-eight of a pound of pulverised alum, and boil the whole together eight or ten minutes until the mass thickens, stirring it well all the time. Now add a quart of hot water, and boil until the paste becomes thick again, and of a pale brownish tint. When well made it will keep from ten to fifteen days.

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